THE LONDON SCHOOL OF ECONOMICS AND POLITICAL SCIENCE

SOUTHEAST ASIA

LSE SAW SWEE HOCK
SOUTHEAST ASIA CENTRE

# Annual Report

## 2025 — 2026



# Table of Contents

SEAC Annual Report 2025/26


01 **About SEAC**

02 **Notes from the Director's Chair**

03 **People at the Centre**
- 3.1. Staff
- 3.2. Management Committee
- 3.3. Advisory Board
- 3.4. Centre Associates
- 3.5. Visiting Fellows & ECR Network Overview
- 3.6. Staff Feature: Hans Steinmüller

04 **SEAC Support for the Students**
- 4.1. PhD Research Support Fund
- 4.2. PhD Student Workshop
- 4.3. PhD Student Research Profile: Hanh-An Trinh
- 4.4. Support for Students
- 4.5. Postgraduate Dissertation Prize
- 4.6. SEAC Cafe

05 **Academic Engagement**
- 5.1. 2025-26 Events
- 5.2. Southeast Asia Forum

06 **Publications**
- 6.1. Working Papers 2025-2026
- 6.2. SEAC Associate Publications
- 6.3. LSE Southeast Asia Blog

07 **Podcast: Dialogues on Southeast Asia**

08 **EDI at the Centre**

09 **AT 2026 Events**

10 **Support us**

# The Saw Swee Hock Southeast Asia Centre

The Saw Swee Hock Southeast Asia Centre (SEAC) at the London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE) is an interdisciplinary research centre whose special contribution to Southeast Asian Studies stems from the signature strengths of the LSE in the social sciences. Academic staff affiliated with the Centre have diverse research interests across the region and are drawn from such disciplines and departments as Anthropology, Economic History, Gender Studies, Geography and Environment, Government, International Development, International History, and International Relations. Key research areas of special interest for the Centre include:

- **The social, political, and policy challenges generated by rapid economic, environmental, demographic, and technological change in Southeast Asia;**
- **The impact of geopolitical tensions and geo-economic competition on Southeast Asia;**
- **Democracy, dictatorship, political change, and conflict in Southeast Asia;**
- **The dynamics of urbanization in Southeast Asia;**
- **The mosaic of gender, ethnic, and religious identities in Southeast Asia.**

## Pushing the Boundaries of Research on Southeast Asia

Academic staff affiliated with the Centre are prolific and prominent scholars in their respective fields of study, and they and their work have been widely cited in the media and consulted by institutions as varied as the Asian Development Bank, the Asia Foundation, the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, the Ford Foundation, Oxfam, the UK's Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, the UNHCR, the US State Department, and the World Bank. The Centre has four core aims:

- **To serve as a gateway and hub for Southeast Asian Studies in the UK and Europe**
- **To promote research on Southeast Asia by LSE staff and students**
- **To facilitate learning about Southeast Asia at the LSE**
- **To share knowledge and understanding of Southeast Asia beyond the LSE**

# Notes from the Director's Chair

John T. Sidel

The past twelve months have revealed the vulnerability of Southeast Asia to diverse forms of crisis, or perhaps what many analysts would describe as an interconnected 'polycrisis', in which demographic, economic, environmental, (geo) political, and technological developments and trends are combining to produce recurring difficulties and disasters across the region. Indeed, the final months of 2025 witnessed massive flooding across areas of Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Thailand, and Vietnam amidst the torrential rains of the monsoon – and typhoon – season, leading to massive disruption, damage, and displacement for hundreds of thousands of residents. Meanwhile, as seen in the photo on the cover of this report, 2026 saw the gradual resurgence of forest and peatland fires in Sumatra and Kalimantan (Indonesian Borneo), leading to severe problems with haze stretching beyond the outer islands of Indonesia to Malaysia, Singapore, and even the Philippines by the summer months of this year.

In early 2026, moreover, the onset of the US-Israeli war on Iran and the resultant disruption to global shipping and oil and gas supplies led to dramatic rises in fuel prices across Southeast Asia as elsewhere, with serious knock-on effects on living standards, economic activity, and government finances in the countries of the region. Even as Myanmar has remained locked in a protracted state of civil war, the ongoing energy crisis has created new policy challenges and political difficulties for embattled government leaders in Indonesia, Malaysia, and the Philippines. With the price of oil on global markets now exceeding $100 a barrel, the conflict expanding from the Strait of Hormuz to the Red Sea, and a 'Super Godzilla Monster' El Niño building up in the Pacific Ocean, Southeast Asia seems certain to experience a serious 'polycrisis' over the remaining months of 2026 and well into 2027. At the same time, the ongoing processes of 'climate change' (i.e. climate emergency) are predicted to render the region more susceptible to the recurring and expanding episodes of large-scale flooding and forest fires experienced by millions of Southeast Asians in recent years.

At the same time, however, the past twelve months have also attested to the impressive adaptability and resilience of both the most vulnerable segments of society and the most powerful fixtures of state power across the region. As illustrated in the photo on the cover of this report, millions of Southeast Asians have had to cope with recurring forest fires and floods, rising fuel prices and other costs, reductions of government services and support, and resurgence of conflict. As scholars like the late James C. Scott have taught us to anticipate, ordinary people across the region are responding to the ongoing crises not only with hardship-induced frugality, flexibility, and forced flight, but also with diverse forms of mutual self-help, community organizing, and occasional acts of open defiance and protest.

Impressive adaptability and resilience are also in evidence in the persistence of economic dynamism and growth across Southeast Asia, even amidst the disruptions to fuel and energy markets, consumer prices, production lines, and supply chains within and beyond the region. Investment, industrial deepening, and exploration of new technologies are continuing to unfold – with varying intensity and impact – across Southeast Asia. The significant

contributions of the region to the world economy – by Southeast Asian fishermen, seafarers, domestic helpers and nurses around the world; in Southeast Asian call centres and other business processing (BPO) activities; through Southeast Asian assembly of semiconductors, diverse hi-tech electronic products; and through Southeast Asian supplies of critical minerals, textiles, footwear, and diverse agricultural commodities – has never been more widely understood and acknowledged. Even seemingly unlikely (and, for some, unlikable) Southeast Asian fruits and root crops – like durian and ube – have come to enjoy unprecedented appeal across the world.

Yet the steadfastness shown by Southeast Asian communities and companies in the face of crisis has been fairly matched by the stubborn resistance to change demonstrated by the political establishments of the region. The military remains entrenched in Myanmar, as do one-party regimes in Cambodia, Laos, Singapore, and Vietnam. In Thailand, the conservative establishment outmanoeuvred the progressive *Prachachon* (People's) Party in the February 2026 elections, leaving power concentrated in the hands of machine politicians, the military, and the monarchy. In Indonesia, President Prabowo Subianto has persisted in pursuing authoritarian and irresponsible policy initiatives despite increasingly vocal expressions of disapproval and alarm in the markets, the polls, and, occasionally, the streets, with an eye on securing re-election – by hook or by crook – in 2029 and a second five-year term in office. Meanwhile, even amidst the ongoing turmoil – and strong prospects for turnover – in Malaysian and Philippine politics, machine politicians and money politics are prevailing over more programmatic approaches to public policymaking.

Perhaps more importantly, governments across the region are continuing to follow an economic development model that privileges economic – and (sub)urban – growth at the expense of equity and environmental protection. Even amidst the ongoing energy crisis and heightened interest in renewables, there is little movement away from the region's heavy dependence on coal and on other fossil fuels. Real-estate development in urban and suburban areas continues to privilege the built environment over concerns about flooding. Land- clearing for the expansion of palm oil plantations persists regardless of the resultant environmental degradation, including the haze generated by forest and peatland fires. The region's growing problem with microplastics is likewise being largely ignored. Meanwhile, Southeast Asian companies – and governments – are working hard to attract investment in data centres despite serious questions about the impact on the supply and cost of electricity. If the ongoing energy crisis spotlights the opportunity – and imperative – of movement towards 'energy transition', it is an opportunity which policymakers in Southeast Asia are largely allowing to go to waste.

Against the sobering backdrop of these dimensions and dynamics of (poly)crisis across the region, it is worth noting some parallels with the increasingly difficult climate for the study of Southeast Asia in the UK and beyond. In recent decades, support for interdisciplinary 'area studies' has disappeared amidst academic trends favouring avowedly universalist social science, stricter enforcement of disciplinary borders and methodological standards, and Big Data. Over the past few years, moreover, universities in the UK and elsewhere have been facing budget cuts, assaults on academic freedom, and diverse challenges presented by rapid development of AI.

The study of Southeast Asia has been dramatically – and deleteriously – affected in terms of a shrinking research funding, job opportunities, and intellectual space, in the UK, the US, Europe, Japan, and Australia, the traditional hubs for the production of academic knowledge and analysis of the region. Indeed, the LSE's Saw Swee Hock Southeast Asia Centre is facing its own existential crisis, as the generous endowment which enabled the Centre's establishment and its operations to date will be exhausted within a few short years. In the absence of financial support from the LSE, external funding bodies, or new donors, the Centre will thus sadly be forced to close within five short years from now.

Nonetheless, the resilience of Southeast Asianists and of Southeast Asian Studies in the face of these challenges and difficulties has been very impressive and very heartening. Specialists on Southeast Asia have continued to engage in fine-grained empirical research and theoretically sophisticated analysis of developments and trends in the region and to produce a steady stream of illuminating and insightful articles, books, reports, and other publications – and podcast episodes – to feed the curiosity of scholars, students, and other interested readers (and listeners). The number of fascinating books on Southeast Asia published over the 2025- 2026 academic year is too great to list here or to keep up with for even the most avid reader. Meanwhile, the marked decline of Southeast Asian Studies in the established sites for production of knowledge and analysis of the region has been accompanied by the dramatic expansion of the field in Southeast Asia itself and, it is worth noting, in China.

Against this backdrop, the LSE's Saw Swee Hock Southeast Asia Centre has worked over the 2025-2026 academic year both to support the study of Southeast Asia at the School and to showcase – for both academic and broader audiences – interesting and important research and analysis in the field produced by our own team of LSE-based scholars and by others from elsewhere across the UK, Europe, Southeast Asia, and beyond. As evidenced elsewhere in this year's Annual Report, the Centre has provided research funding to postgraduate students working on MSc dissertations and PhD theses focused on Southeast Asia, as well as members of academic staff undertaking research in the region. The Centre has also sponsored a blog series with a steady stream of interesting and informative postings, as well as a podcast series, 'Dialogues on Southeast Asia', with occasional episodes covering important issues and trends across the region.

Overall, the Centre has tried to promote an environment in which a community of scholars and students interested in Southeast Asia can convene and confer on a regular basis to discuss issues of shared interest. We have extended these efforts beyond the LSE, as seen in our continuing sponsorship of an annual PhD Workshop for research students working on Southeast Asia at universities across the UK. In June 2026, the annual workshop featured presentations by twenty-one PhD students from universities in London, from Oxford, Cambridge, and Leeds, and even from Amsterdam and Santa Cruz, California.

Over the course of the 2025-2026 academic year, moreover, the Centre hosted a series of lectures, book launches, film screenings, roundtable discussions, and other events which covered a diverse range of issues of importance across Southeast Asia. Several lectures focused on the challenges, constraints, and difficulties facing democratic politics in Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, and Thailand, featuring prominent scholars of Southeast Asian politics like Nicole Curato (University of Birmingham), Sana Jaffrey (Australian National University) Dan Slater (University of Michigan), and Mark Thompson (City University of Hong Kong). Other lectures focused on the ongoing crisis in Myanmar, extending coverage to the Rohingyas stranded in refugee camps in Bangladesh.

Many other events hosted by the Centre treated urgent economic and environmental issues. In March 2026, Dr. Emma Colven and Dr. Zara Shabrina of King's College London (KCL) shared some of the findings of their British Academy-funded research project on Jakarta as a 'sinking city', and Dr. Jordana Ramalho of University of College London (UCL) spoke about the impact of real-estate development and urban 'regeneration' on informal markets and settlements in the Philippine city of Cebu. Our annual Southeast Asia Forum in May 2026 focused on the growing problem of flooding across Southeast Asia, with specialists presenting research and analysis of flooding in Indonesia, the Philippines, Thailand, and Vietnam. The speakers' presentations have been reassembled as a collection of essays for publication in the Centre's Working Papers series, under the title "Flooding in Southeast Asia: Causes, Consequences, and Policy Challenges."

The Centre's events over the 2025-2026 year covered a diverse range of other issues as well. In October 2025, Mark Bo spoke about his new co-authored book, *Scam: Inside*

*Southeast Asia's Cybercrime Compounds* (Verso, 2025). In early December 2025, the Centre hosted several events on sexuality in Southeast Asia, including a day-long workshop on queer activism. In May 2026, Dr. Saskia Schäfer discussed her new book, *Mobilizing Mainstream Islam: The Politics of Orthodoxy in Indonesia in Comparative Perspective* (Cornell University, 2026). The Centre sponsored two documentary film screenings, one focusing on long-time Cambodian strongman Hun Sen, the other revisiting the Indonesian occupation of East Timor (1975-1999). Our weekly seminar series also featured very interesting talks by historians on issues as diverse as Chinese migration and settlement in Southeast Asia, dissent in Vietnam, and the *Partai Komunis Indonesia* (PKI). Overall, our events covered an impressive breadth of countries and issues across Southeast Asia, drawing on the expertise and analytical insights of specialists based in London, elsewhere in the UK, Europe, Australia, and Southeast Asia.

Over the course of the 2025-2026 academic year, moreover, the Centre worked to strengthen its linkages with scholars working on Southeast Asia across the world. The Centre hosted two Visiting Fellows over the year, Dr. Arnold Puyok of the Universiti Malaysia Sarawak (UNIMAS) and Dr. Tharaphi Than of Northern Illinois University, both of whom gave very interesting presentations on their research in our weekly seminar series. Meanwhile, the Centre extended its roster of non-LSE-based Research Associates to include three accomplished and eminent scholars of Southeast Asia with close connections to the LSE since their days as PhD students at the School: Professor Judith Bovensiepen (Institute for Social Anthropology, Austrian Academy of Sciences), Professor Joseph Chinyong Liow (Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy, National University of Singapore), and Professor Thitinan Pongsudhirak (Institute of Security and International Studies, Chulalongkorn University). These three LSE alumni complement two veteran Research Associates, Dr. Sin Yee Koh (Universiti Brunei Darussalam) and Professor Duncan McCargo (Nanyang Technological University) to provide the Centre with valuable points of access and outreach across Europe and Southeast Asia, as well as diverse sources of expert advice and assistance to the Centre in its work.

Overall, the 2025-2026 academic year was a very busy and demanding year for the Southeast Asia Centre, against the backdrop of crisis-level challenges for Southeast Asia and Southeast Asians. As we gear up for the 2026-2027 academic year with a raft of new events and activities scheduled for the months ahead, we are mindful of the difficult realities in the region and have co-organized with The Asia Foundation a special workshop focused on the energy crisis in Southeast Asia for November 2026.

As Director, moreover, I remain very grateful for the strenuous efforts and sustained effectiveness of my colleague Dr. Petra Alderman as Centre Manager in organizing and overseeing the diverse set of events, activities, and initiatives sponsored and sustained by the Centre. I am also grateful for the hard work of our Communications and Events Assistant Yoko Fink over the past academic year, for the contributions of our Research Associates within and beyond the LSE, and for the wise advice and generous guidance provided by members of our Management Committee – Dr. Sharmila Parmanand, Professor Hyun Bang Shin, Professor Hans Steinmuller, and Dr. Qingfei Yin – and our Advisory Board – Professor Anne Booth (SOAS), Professor Beng Huat Chua (National University of Singapore), Dr. Suraya Ismail (Khazanah Research Institute), and Professor Jonathan Rigg (University of Bristol). The Centre depends heavily on the productivity and generosity of scholars working across the sprawling archipelago of Southeast Asia Studies, connecting us here in London to colleagues elsewhere in the UK, and across the world, most obviously and importantly in Southeast Asia itself. Looking back over the past 2025-2026 academic year, there is much to be grateful for, and looking ahead to the new 2026-2027 academic year, there is much to look forward to as well.

# People at the Centre



## John Sidel

Centre Director

Professor Sidel is Sir Patrick Gillam Chair in International and Comparative Politics (Joint appt. LSE Government & LSE IR) and Director of the Saw Swee Hock Southeast Asia Centre. He received his BA and MA from Yale University and his PhD from Cornell University. He is the author of *Capital, Coercion, and Crime: Bossism in the Philippines* (Stanford University Press, 1999); (with Eva-Lotta Hedman) *Philippine Politics and Society in the Twentieth Century: Colonial Legacies, Postcolonial Trajectories* (Routledge, 2000); *Riots, Pogroms, Jihad: Religious Violence in Indonesia* (Cornell University Press, 2006); *The Islamist Threat in Southeast Asia: A Reassessment* (East-West Center, 2007); (with Jaime Faustino) *Thinking and Working Politically in Development: Coalitions for Change in the Philippines* (The Asia Foundation, 2020); and *Republicanism, Communism, Islam: Cosmopolitan Origins of Revolution in Southeast Asia* (Cornell University Press, 2021).



## Petra Alderman

Centre Manager

Dr Petra Alderman holds a PhD in Politics and International Studies from the University of Leeds, and before joining LSE she completed research fellowships at the University of Birmingham and the University of Copenhagen. Petra's research focuses on democracy, authoritarianism, and promotional politics, with a particular expertise on Thailand. She is the author of *Branding Authoritarian Nations: Political Legitimation and Strategic National Myths in Military-Ruled Thailand* (Routledge, 2023), a monograph that offers a novel approach to the study of nation branding in authoritarian regimes. Her other academic work has been published in leading disciplinary and area studies journals, including *International Affairs*, *International Political Science Review*, *Geopolitics*, *Politics* and *Journal of Current Southeast Asian Affairs*.



## Yoko Fink

Communications and Events Assistant

Yoko managed the Centre's event logistics and communications over the course of the 2025-2026 academic year, while pursuing a Master's in Culture and Conflict in a Global Europe at LSE's European Institute.

## SEAC Management Committee

The Management Committee convenes and communicates to oversee and advance the Centre's agenda and to help ensure that the Centre's activities and resources are effectively managed in accordance with the Centre's objectives and the School's policies and guidelines. The Committee is also expected to provide consultation for the Centre's direction and development and to make other contributions to the Centre's activities through the advice and assistance of its members.

- **Professor John Sidel (Chair; Centre Director)**
- **Dr Petra Alderman (Centre Manager)**
- **Professor Hyun Bang Shin (SEAC Associate; former SEAC Director; Head of the Department of Geography and Environment)**
- **Dr Qingfei Yin (SEAC Associate; Department of International History)**
- **Professor Hans Steinmuller (SEAC Associate; Department of Anthropology)**
- **Dr Sharmila Parmanand (SEAC Associate; Department of Gender Studies)**

## SEAC Advisory Board

The Advisory Board provides independent and external advice and general guidance to SEAC to help ensure robust programming, research agendas, outreach, and increased support for the Centre.

- Professor Jonathan Rigg (Chair; Chair in Human Geography, University of Bristol)
- Professor Anne Booth (Emeritus Professor of Economics, SOAS)
- Professor Chua Beng Huat (Emeritus Professor, Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, NUS)
- Dr Suraya Ismail (Research Director, Khazanah Research Institute)
- Professor John Sidel (Centre Director)
- Dr Petra Alderman (Centre Manager)



**Anne Booth** is Emeritus Professor of Economics at the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London (SOAS). Anne graduated from Victoria University, Wellington, and then did graduate work at the Australian National University. She subsequently taught at the University of Singapore for three years before returning to the ANU as a research fellow. In 1991, she accepted a chair at SOAS, University of London. She was awarded a Lee Kong Chian fellowship in 2015/16. Anne has had a long-standing interest in economic development in Asia, with a particular focus on Indonesia. Her most recent book, *Living Standards in Southeast Asia: Changes over the Long Twentieth Century, 1900-2015*, was published by Amsterdam University Press in 2019. She is currently working on a study of the impact of globalisation on Southeast Asia from the pre-colonial period to the present.



**Chua Beng Huat** is Emeritus Professor, Department of Sociology and Anthropology, National University of Singapore (NUS) and Visiting Professor, the Urban Institute, Singapore Management University. His published work includes *Political Legitimacy and Housing: Stakeholding in Singapore* (Routledge, 1997); *Communitarian Ideology and Democracy in Singapore* (Routledge, 2002), *Life is Not Complete Without Shopping: Consumption Culture in Singapore* (NUS Press, 2003); *Elections as Popular Culture in Asia* (Routledge, 2007); *Structure, Audience and Soft Power in East Asian Pop Culture* (Hong Kong University Press, 2012); *Liberalism Disavowed: Communitarianism and State Capitalism in Singapore* (NUS Press and Cornell University Press, 2017); and *Public Subsidy/Private Accumulation: Political Economy of Singapore's Public Housing* (NUS Press, 2024).



**Jonathan Rigg** is Professor of Human Geography at the University of Bristol and adjunct professor at Chulalongkorn University, Bangkok. He has worked on questions of agrarian change and broader development transformations in Southeast (and South) Asia since the 1980s. He is the author of ten books, including *Rural Development in Southeast Asia: Dispossession, Accumulation and Persistence* (Cambridge University Press, 2020) and *More Than Rural: Textures of Thailand's Agrarian Transformation* (University of Hawai'i Press, 2019). He is currently working on a Wellcome Trust funded project exploring outdoor work and extreme weather in Vietnam and completing a new book with the working title *The Relational Village*, under contract with Cornell University Press.



**Collin Liu** is the Chief Operating and Sustainability Officer at Rajah & Tann Asia, Southeast Asia's largest legal network, where he also serves on the firm's Regional Management Council. He brings over 25 years of experience spanning operations, strategy, and governance across Asia and Europe. Prior to his current role, Collin was Chief Operating Officer and a member

of the Management Committee at Baker McKenzie Asia, held senior business development roles at Allen & Gledhill LLP and PwC Singapore, and began his career as an international tax consultant in London and Singapore. A qualified chartered accountant, Collin currently sits on the board of The Arts House Ltd and is a director of Citystate Capital Asia Pte. Ltd. He previously served as Chair and Trustee of The Singapore LSE Trust, President of the LSE Alumni Association of Singapore, and Vice-Chair of the LSE Alumni Association in London. He remains a lifelong volunteer and supporter of various cultural, educational and charitable causes. Collin holds an honours degree in Economics from the LSE.



**Suraya Ismail** is Director of Research at Khazanah Research Institute (KRI), a not-for-profit public policy research institute in Malaysia. She is a council member of the National Costs of Living Council (NACCOL), Ministry of Domestic Trade and Costs of Living (KPDN), and a member of the Panel of Experts (POE), Ministry of Housing and Local Government (KPKT). She has served as a Visiting Scholar at the Centre of Housing and Planning (CCHP), University of Cambridge. She has authored and co-authored book-length policy reports, published chapters in academic books and journals, provided policy briefs for governments at home and abroad, and was involved in collaborative work with agencies such as the Asian Coalition for Housing Rights (ACHR), UN-Habitat, Aga Khan Trust for Culture (AKTC) and Fundacion Metropoli. Suraya was educated at the University of Reading, the University of Malaya and the Bartlett School, UCL. Her research interests include the history of economic growth, housing, cities and regional development, theories of the firm, and institutional economics. She is a Chartered Surveyor with the Royal Institute of Surveyors, Malaysia (RISM).

## LSE SEAC Associates



**Catherine Allerton** is Professor of Anthropology at the LSE and served as Head of the Department of Anthropology over 2022-2025. She is a specialist in the anthropology of island Southeast Asia, with research interests in children and childhoods, migration, kinship, place and landscape. She has conducted ethnographic fieldwork in rural Manggarai, in the west of the Indonesian island of Flores, and with children of Filipino and Indonesian refugees and migrants in urban Kota Kinabalu, the capital of the East Malaysian state of Sabah. She is the author of *Potent Landscapes: Place and Mobility in Eastern Indonesia* (University of Hawai'i Press, 2013) and of the edited volume *Children: Ethnographic Encounters* (Routledge, 2016). She is currently completing *Impossible Children*, a book about childhood, exclusion and migrant life in Sabah.



**Laura Antona** is Assistant Professor in Human Geography at the LSE. She is a feminist geographer whose research is centred on labour migration, forced migrant removal, and violence in the Southeast Asian region. Laura's work both draws upon and contributes to feminist political economy, urban geography, and critical migration studies, while centring methodological innovation.



**Lei (Alice) Bian** is a Policy Fellow (Sustainable Societies) at the Grantham Research Institute on Climate Change and the Environment. Alice is leading policy-oriented applied research and engagement activities linked to the LSE's Global School of Sustainability's "Building sustainable societies" theme, with a focus on terrestrial and marine food and nutritional security in a climate-insecure world. She is Principal Investigator for a British Academy ODA Challenge-Oriented research project on **Tackling climate change through health-oriented policy interventions in coastal marinescapes** in the Philippines, supported under the UK Government's International Science Partnerships Fund. She has previously worked at Clean Air Asia, the World Health Organization, and the Asian Development Bank. Alice received her Master of Food and Resource Economics from the University of British Columbia, and an MSc in Global Energy and Climate Policy from SOAS, University of London. Starting in September 2026, she is a PhD student in Environmental Policy and Development programme at the Department of Geography and Environment.



**Fenella Cannell** is Associate Professor in the LSE's Department of Anthropology and is a specialist in Southeast Asian anthropology. She is the author of *Power and Intimacy in the Christian Philippines* (Cambridge University Press, 1999) and the editor of *The Anthropology of Christianity* (Duke University Press, 2006). Her research explores the ways in which people have come to think about "culture" in postcolonial societies and focuses on women's lives and arranged marriages, spirit-mediumship, saints' cults and religion, and popular performances, including transvestite beauty contests. She has also carried out historical research on the Philippines, especially on education, kinship, and gender in the American colonial period.



**Kent Deng** is Professor in Economic History in the LSE Department of Economic History. He leads the LSE postgraduate module "Economic Development of East and Southeast Asia". His research interests and writing include the rise of the literati in the economic life of pre-modern China, the maritime economic history of Asia, and more recently the industrialisation and modernity in East China.



**Tim Forsyth** is Professor of Environment and Development at LSE. He has more than six years' worth of work and professional experience within Southeast Asia and is fluent in Thai with skills in Bahasa Indonesia and Burmese. His research focuses on the politics of environmental policymaking, with a particular interest in understanding local environmental risk and livelihoods and reflecting this knowledge in global environmental policies and assessments.



**Jürgen Haacke** is Associate Professor in International Relations at LSE. He teaches and researches on the international relations of Southeast Asia, especially the foreign and security policies of Southeast Asian states, the role and policies of major powers in relation to the ASEAN region, and regional multilateral cooperation. He has published particularly widely on ASEAN and Myanmar's foreign policy. From August 2016 until July 2018 Dr Haacke was Director of LSE SEAC.



**Nicholas Long** is Associate Professor of Anthropology at LSE. He works on the anthropology of Indonesia and the Malay World (with a particular interest in Indonesia's Riau Archipelago), and on responses to COVID-19 in the UK and Aotearoa New Zealand. He won the 2019 Stirling Prize for Best Published Work in Psychological Anthropology for his article 'Suggestions of Power: Searching for Efficacy in Indonesia's Hypnosis Boom'. He has recently completed an ESRC-funded ethnographic study of Indonesia's hypnosis and hypnotherapy circuit.



**Sharmila Parmanand** is Assistant Professor and Programme Director for the MSc in Gender, Development and Globalisation degree at LSE. Her research examines the colonial histories and gendered logics that underpin development and humanitarian interventions in the Global South, with a focus on the politics of knowledge production and feminist entanglements with the state on issues such as migration, gender-based violence, precarious labour, economic restructuring and social protection. She also studies connections between gender and populism and gender and political dynasties in the Philippines. She is a member of the editorial board of the *Anti-Trafficking Review,* co-convenor of the UK Development Studies Association Gender and Development Study Group, and an affiliate of the ANU-Philippines Institute.



**James Putzel** is Professor of Development Studies in the International Development Department, LSE, where he served as head of Department 1999-2001 and Director of the Crisis States Research Centre from 2001-2011 and now directs the MSc in Development Studies. He is well-known for his research in the Philippines where he has maintained active research since 1984. His articles and books on Southeast Asia have examined agrarian reform, developmental states, democratic transitions, social capital, development aid, NGOs and civil society, nationalism, armed conflict, communist movements, the role of political Islam and the rise of rightist populist politics.



**Kirsten Schulze** is a Professor in International History at the LSE. She works on ethno-religious violence, communal and separatist conflicts, as well as militant Islamism in Indonesia. She is the author of *Contesting Indonesia: Islamist, Separatist, and Communal Conflict in Indonesia since 1945* (Cornell University Press 2024) as well as numerous articles on local jihad in Ambon and Poso, Indonesian jihadi training camps home and abroad, and how Aceh moved from conflict to peace. Her new research project looks at the Indonesian Spice Islands during the French Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars.



**Hyun Bang Shin** is a former Director of the Saw Swee Hock Southeast Asia Centre (2018-2023) and currently serves as Professor of Geography and Urban Studies and Head of the Department of Geography and Environment. His work spans four key areas: gentrification, urban political economy, urban struggles, and the circulation of urbanism. By challenging conventional perspectives, Professor Shin has contributed to reshaping the understanding of contemporary urban transformation, emphasising the socio-political dynamics of cities in rapidly developing regions, including East and Southeast Asia. His published work includes *Planetary Gentrification* (2016, Polity Press), *Neoliberal Urbanism, Contested Cities and Housing in Asia* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2019), *Covid-19 in Southeast Asia: Insights for a Post-pandemic World* (LSE Press, 2022), and *The Political Economy of Megaprojects in Asia* (Routledge, 2025).



**Thomas Smith** is Associate Professor of Environmental Geography at LSE. He is an environmental scientist specialising in the causes, dynamics and impacts of tropical peatland fires and associated 'haze' pollution in maritime Southeast Asia. He has conducted extensive field research into greenhouse gas emissions from the peatlands of Indonesia, Malaysia, and Brunei, as well as measuring smoke composition at multiple peat fire incidents and experimental fires in the region.

His research extends to the social sciences with recent work focusing on the semantic construction of the 'haze season' and how perceptions of novel seasonalities are influenced by the media, governments, corporates, and artists, and why this might be impacting haze mitigation and/or adaptation.



**Hans Steinmüller** is Professor in the Department of Anthropology, LSE and a specialist in the anthropology of China. He has conducted long-term fieldwork in Hubei Province (central China) and in the Wa hills of the China-Myanmar border. Publications include the monograph *Communities of Complicity* (Berghahn 2013), and more recently special issues on Governing Opacity (*Ethnos* 2023) and Crises of Care in China Today (*China Quarterly* 2023). He is editor of *Social Analysis* and convenor of the MSc programme 'China in Comparative Perspective'.



**Qingfei Yin** is Assistant Professor of International History at LSE. A historian of contemporary China and inter-Asian relations, her research focuses on China's relations with its Asian neighbours, Asian borderlands, and the Cold War in Asia. Her book *State Building in Cold War Asia: Comrades and Competitors on the Sino-Vietnamese Border* was published by Cambridge University Press in 2024. Her current research projects are on Chinese seamen (including overseas Chinese) during the Cold War and the history of China's ocean shipping during Mao's era, including how it sustained the social and economic connections between China and Southeast Asia

## Non-LSE SEAC Associates



**Judith Bovensiepen** is Director of the Institute for Social Anthropology at the Austrian Academy of Sciences in Vienna. Her research examines human–environment relations in Timor-Leste, where she has conducted long-term ethnographic fieldwork since 2004. Her work has explored how highland communities have rebuilt their lives in the aftermath of the Indonesian occupation. More recently, she focuses on the social and environmental impacts of infrastructure development and resource extraction, with particular attention to how these processes reshape people's relationships with the land.



**Joseph Liow** (Joseph Chinyong Liow) is Dean and Wang Gungwu Professor in East Asian Affairs at the Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy, National University of Singapore. He is also concurrently Chairman of the Middle East Institute at the university. He previously served as Dean at the College of Humanities, Arts, and Social Sciences as well as the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies, Nanyang Technological University. Joseph's research interests are in Muslim politics and social movements in Southeast Asia, and the international politics of the Asia-Pacific region. He has published extensively on these topics on scholarly, policy, and public interest platforms.



**Duncan McCargo** is President's Chair in Global Affairs at Nanyang Technological University, Singapore. He previously held professorial appointments at the University of Leeds, at Columbia University (where he co-founded the New York Southeast Asia Network), and at the University of Copenhagen (where he directed the Nordic Institute of Asian Studies). Duncan works on the comparative politics of Southeast Asia, especially Thailand's ongoing domestic upheavals. His most recent books are *Fighting for Virtue: Justice and Politics in Thailand* (Cornell 2019) and *Future Forward: The Rise and Fall of a Thai Political Party* (with Anyarat Chattharakul, NIAS, 2020). Duncan co-hosts the Talking Thai Politics and New Books in Southeast Asian Studies podcasts. Website: **thaipolitics.leeds.ac.uk**



**Sin Yee Koh** is Senior Assistant Professor of Asian Migration, Mobility and Diaspora at the Institute of Asian Studies, Universiti Brunei Darussalam; and Adjunct Senior Research Fellow at the School of Arts and Social Sciences, Monash University Malaysia. She is a human geographer working at the intersections of migration studies and urban studies. Her work uses the lens of migration and mobility to understand the circulations of people, capital, and aspirations in and through cities. She has published on migration and colonial legacies, academic and teacher expatriate mobilities, migration and urban intermediaries, lifestyle migration-led urban speculation, cities and the super-rich, and the globalisation of real estate.



**Thitinan Pongsudhirak** is Professor of International Relations and Senior Fellow at Chulalongkorn University's Institute of Security and International Studies in Bangkok. His work explores geopolitics and geoeconomics of ASEAN/Southeast Asia as well as comparative politics in the region, with reference to Thailand and mainland Southeast Asia. He is also involved in Track II and think-tank work within the ASEAN-ISIS network and broader Asia, Europe and the United States. With more than 30 years of experience, he has recently focused on ASEAN/Southeast Asia in the geostrategic dynamics of US-China relations and Thailand's political trajectory in the 2020s and 2030s.

## Visiting Fellows

SEAC's Visiting Appointment scheme provides an opportunity for visiting researchers to spend 6-12 weeks at SEAC and LSE, benefitting from access to LSE facilities and events, along with opportunities for networking and collaboration across the LSE community. Visiting researchers form an integral part of SEAC's research culture and community, delivering talks, writing blogposts and working papers, and otherwise participating in SEAC events and activities. All applications for visiting fellowships go through a rigorous panel assessment, and opportunities are competitive. Applicants are selected based on the strength of their proposals.

SEAC was delighted to welcome three Visiting Fellows during the 2025/26 year:



**Dr. Arnold Puyok** is a Senior Lecturer in Politics and Government Studies at the Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities, Universiti Malaysia Sarawak (UNIMAS). He is a founding member of the Territorial Autonomy Study Group based at the Education University of Hong Kong and currently serves as a Senior Visiting Fellow at the ISEAS – Yusof Ishak Institute in Singapore. His research examines the political dynamics of Sabah and Sarawak, particularly the resurgence of 'regionalism' in the Borneo states and its implications for Malaysian federalism. He also explores the intersection of culture—especially ethnic identity—and political processes across the Borneo States and neighbouring Kalimantan.



**Dr. Tharaphi Than** is a historian and interdisciplinary scholar whose research weaves together feminism, social movements, and print media. Her recent work includes two edited volumes featuring practitioners' narratives through a feminist lens. She currently works as an Associate Professor at Northern Illinois University and volunteers with the Virtual Federal University, providing alternative education opportunities for students in Myanmar.



**Dr. Jeremy Siow** is a Postdoctoral Research Fellow in Quantitative Political Science at the Department of Politics and International Relations, University of Oxford. His research examines education policy and intergroup relations in Singapore and Malaysia, with a focus on how language-of-instruction policies and civic education shape ethnic politics. He also studies broader influences on ethnic politics in the region, including how Chinese propaganda shapes diaspora identity and communal loyalties, and how democratic reforms affect ethnic coalitions and intergroup competition in Malaysia.

## LSE-Southeast Asia Early Career Researcher (ECR) Network

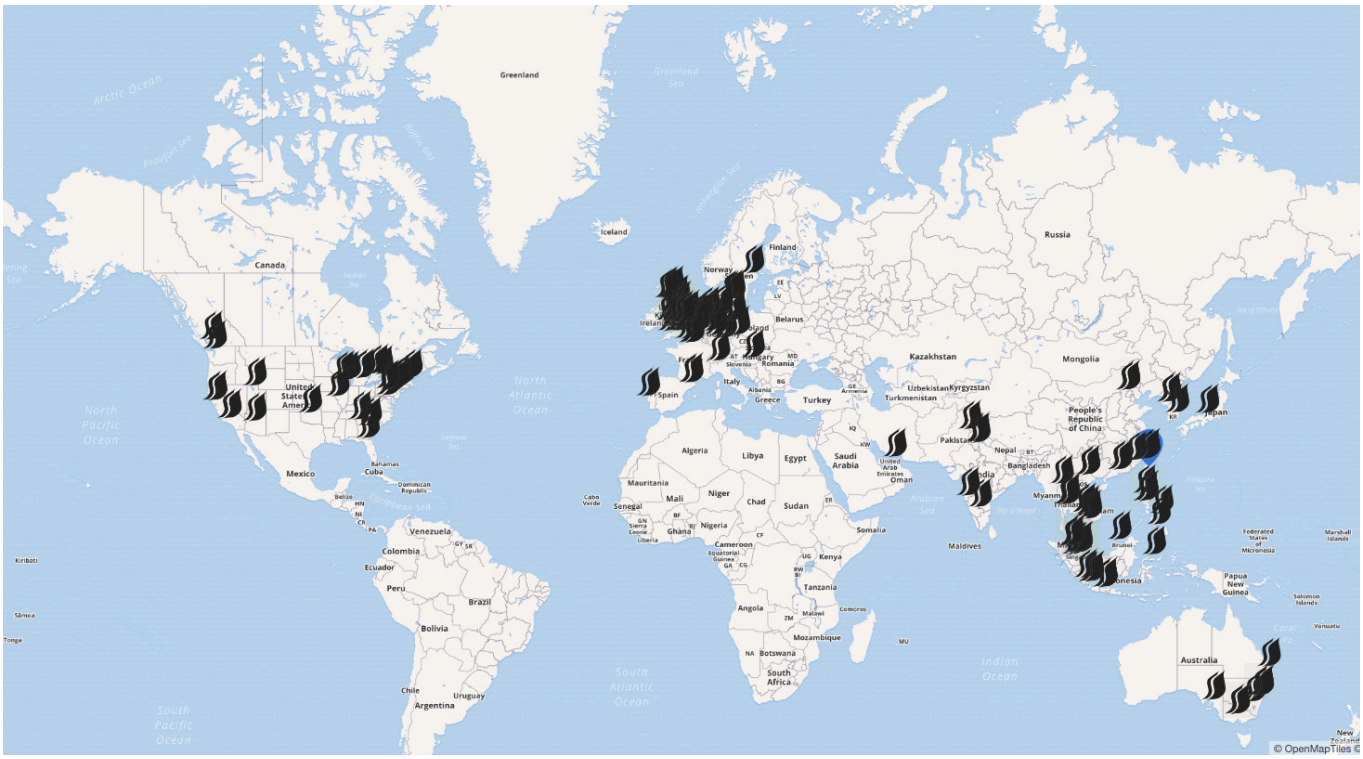
SEAC's ECR Network has continued to grow in the past year, with 328 members who have research interests across the region, and actively engage via dedicated events, ECR newsletters, and social media promotion.

## ECR Network Members

| | | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 35 Malaysia | 39 Philippines | 77 Indonesia | 17 Vietnam | 25 Singapore | 6 Laos | 20 Myanmar | 17 Cambodia | 72 ASEAN | 20 Thailand |

328 Total

Below is a screenshot of the SEAC interactive global map of network members (accessible at **https://maphub.net/LSESEAC/LSE-SEAC-ECR**), which permits anybody to search by country specialism, locate researchers with similar interests, and promote increased collaboration and scholarly work on Southeast Asia.




**Scan to visit ECR Network Page >**

## Staff Feature: Professor Hans Steinmüller



I first went to China as a doctoral student in 2005, with a research proposal on the social changes taking place in the countryside; in particular, I wanted to understand what was left of Maoism and how ordinary people related to the communist state. My PhD thesis and later my monograph, *Communities of Complicity* (2013), grew out of that fieldwork in Hubei Province, where the party-state is omnipresent and yet everyday life is full of practices that official discourse constantly condemns, such as ancestor rituals, gift-giving, and gambling. I argued that fleeting 'communities of complicity' form around such practices, held together by shared embarrassment and indirect communication. This situation is the result of a long history of indoctrination, propaganda, and discipline exercised in state institutions. While this seemed both obvious and inevitable in central China, I began wondering what happens at the edges of state power, where government institutions are weak or absent altogether? That has become a central question guiding my research, which took me to the Wa State, an autonomous region in eastern Myanmar bordering China's Yunnan Province. Crossing the Nan Kham River that marks the international border between the PRC and Myanmar, I left China and entered Southeast Asia.

The Wa State of Myanmar is a typical de-facto state: an area the size of Belgium that does not appear on international maps and that is governed by an independent army that exercises all the sovereign functions of a nation-state. Since 2013 I have done altogether more than two years of participant observation there. The Wa hills have often been described, following Scott and Van Schendel's influential 'Zomia' thesis, as a stateless refuge from lowland state power. My research tells a very different story: the Wa State is an intensely militarised polity, where sovereignty is exercised informally, through networks of patronage and violence. To understand how this works, with relatively little paperwork or recourse to law, I have developed a conceptual framework that connects **violent capture** (*Comparative Studies in Society and History* 2019) and **nourishing care** (*Comparative Studies in Society and History* 2022). Concretely, I analyse the trajectories of child soldiers who are forcefully recruited by the Wa army. The counterweight to that violence is the care of the commanders: the army elites are expected to nourish and look after soldiers under their authority. My monograph *The Commander's Children* analyses the ambiguous relations of capture and care that form between the army command and ordinary villagers in this military state. I just finished final revisions and the book will come out in Summer 2027 with University of California Press. You can hear more about this research, and about the Wa State as a borderland between China and Myanmar, in a **conversation** I recorded with John Sidel for SEAC's podcast series *Dialogues on Southeast Asia*.

From the vantage point of the Wa Hills and Southeast Asia more broadly, I came to think about China in different ways. For instance, I have written about the problems of relating to China in an article on **shanzhai**; a Chinese neologism for a cheap copy, that is sometimes used to disparage the Wa State as a minor imitation of China. In recent years, I've also carried out exploratory fieldwork on relations between Chinese mining companies and Indigenous communities in the Ecuadorian Amazon, and I'm now developing this research into a larger comparative study of Chinese extractivism. In these ways, I've turned from the comparative study of China to the study of global China, and the interrogation of China's relation to the World is a core theme in my current research, including a collaboration with fellow China anthropologists on **China as context**.

Alongside this empirical work, I'm interested in general theory in social anthropology, related to concepts such as opacity, scale, and complexity. With my partner Natalia Buitron I've pursued some of these interests in special issues, including **Governing Opacity** (*Ethnos* 2023) and **Nightmare Egalitarianism** (*Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 2026). In my current work, I'm trying to develop an anthropological theory of complexity. I start from the observation that 'simple' stateless societies are often immensely intricate in their social arrangements, while 'complex' state societies rest on processes of simplification. Accordingly, we need to revise what we understand by 'simplicity' and 'complexity', and that is what I have been trying to do in collaborations with anthropologists and archaeologists, for instance in a **paper** on the archaeology of the Kula ring and in my **inaugural professorial lecture** at the LSE.

At the LSE Department of Anthropology, I teach general anthropology, have served as Programme Director of the '*China in Comparative Perspective*' MSc program since 2011, and this year I am the Deputy Head of Department for Teaching. My teaching and research directly inform each other, and my long engagement with China anthropology has also produced a co-authored textbook, China in Comparative Perspective (2017). Beyond the department, I serve on SEAC Management Committee; I am a research fellow on the ERC-funded Extortion project led by Lucia Michelutti at UCL, and a core member of the British Academy's 'Chinese Global Orders' global convening programme. I regularly review in Anthropology and Chinese Studies, I am on the editorial board of several journals (including the *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*), and I co-edit the journal **Social Analysis**.

# SEAC Support for Students

## PhD Research Support Fund

SEAC provides financial support to LSE doctoral students through the Fieldwork Support Fund and the Conference Fund. The Fieldwork Support Fund provides funding for fieldwork in Southeast Asia, covering travel, accommodation, local services (e.g., transcription/translation), and purchase of research materials. The Conference Fund provides support to enable participation in academic conferences, covering registration fees, travel, and accommodation. These two funds are intended to help doctoral students advance their research and networks and to support the next generation of Southeast Asia scholars. In 2025-26, fieldwork support was provided to Hema Balarama (Economics), Morris Chan (Government), Joel Chong (Government), Muskan Jain (Economics), Maarten Jonker (International History), Mek Ajay Sribhibhadh (Economic History), and Theint Theint Thu (Government). Conference support was made to Armand Bin Azlira (International History), Marco Del Gallo (Anthropology), and Tiffany Lau (Government).

**"I used the SEAC PhD Research Support Fund to travel to Jakarta for focus group discussions and meetings with relevant government officials. The grant was instrumental in securing access to administrative data and in developing a better understanding of how local people use public spaces, both of which have directly shaped the empirical work in my thesis on how people of different genders value places within cities differently."**

**- Muskan Jain (Economics)**

**"The SEAC PhD Support Fund enabled me to present my research at the European Association for Southeast Asian Studies (EuroSEAS) conference in Amsterdam and the Association of Southeast Asian Studies UK (ASEAS UK) conference in Cambridge. These opportunities allowed me to share my work on China's public diplomacy and its effects on political attitudes and inter-ethnic relations in Malaysia with a community of scholars specialising in Southeast Asia, and the feedback I received from these subject matter experts was invaluable and has shaped the direction of my thesis. Beyond funding, SEAC's broader work in building a community of Southeast Asianist scholars has been just as valuable. The PhD student workshops give students the rare opportunity to present their work to peers who share this regional focus, and to build a network of scholars dedicated to studying a fascinating but understudied region. This kind of institutional support has been instrumental as I prepare to move into the postdoctoral stage of my career, and I am very grateful to SEAC for its role in sustaining and growing this community."**

**- Tiffany Lau (Government)**

**"The LSE SEAC PhD Support Fund supported my fieldwork in Thailand, where I was able to access various Thai archives, depositary libraries, and temple libraries. During the trip I was also able to meet invaluable interlocutors and local researchers who greatly assisted with my field research. The four months in Thailand that were funded by the SEAC also allowed me to embed myself in the field in a way that would have not been possible with short trips, ultimately greatly enhancing the richness and complexity of my doctoral research."**

**- Joel Chong (Government)**





## PhD Student Workshop

SEAC hosted a workshop for PhD students across the UK working on Southeast Asia on 3 June 2026. The workshop allowed twenty-one UK university-based research or visiting students working on the region to present their work before their peers for feedback and provided a broader opportunity for sharing ideas and information related to ongoing doctoral research focused on Southeast Asia.

**The Political Economy of Development and Growth in Southeast Asia**

Andy Chin (King's College London), "Industrial Policy, Appropriate Technology Transfer, and Upgrading in Malaysia's Semiconductor Industry"

Jettawat Pravat (King's College London), "Latecomer Upgrading in Global Value Chains: Structural Constraints and Bottom-Up Agency in the Case of Thailand"

Natalie Page (University of Bath), "The Political Economy of Agricultural FDI and Food Security in Kampong Speu Province, Cambodia"

Fandi Achmad (University of Oxford), "The 3S Learning Framework: A Digital Learning-by-Exporting Mechanism"

Dythia Sendrata (King's College London), "Regional Productive Capabilities, Growth, and Inequality: An Economic Complexity Perspective on Indonesia"

**Gender and Society in Southeast Asia**

Alifia Marina Syarfi (School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London), "Gender Norms and Changing Economic Conditions: Rethinking Women's Work and Gender Inequality in Indonesia's Labour Market"

Jesita Ajani (University of Oxford), "Broadcasting Norms: State Media, Intrahousehold Dynamics, and Child Welfare in Indonesia's New Order Regime (1967-1998)"

Kevin Tan (School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London), "Uneven Reorganisation of Social Reproduction: A Case Study of Households in the Philippines and Singapore"

Kuan Huai Pa (King's College London/National University of Singapore), "Negotiating Womanhood: Women in Leftist Movements and Student Activism in Peninsular Malaysia, 1960s-70s"

**Understandings and Experiences of Power, Religion, and the Environment in Southeast Asia**

Said Effendy (University of Cambridge), "The Life of a Document: Changing Ethics of Interaction Among the Kensiu of Kedah, Malaysia"

Wayne Huang (University of California at Santa Cruz), "'To Be Seen, Not Counted': Obscure Economies in Islamic Sumatra"

Wisarut Wongnom (University of Leeds), "Affective Mobilisation of Thai Hyper-Royalist Vigilantism in Contemporary Thailand"

**Communications, Education, and Knowledge in Southeast Asia and Southeast Asian Studies**

Anh Dinh-Hong (University College London), "When the Popularity of Podcasts in Vietnam is Party Rooted from the Long-Established Radio-Listening Habits of Vietnamese People: From Wartime Communal Radio and Public Loudspeakers"

Dwinanda Ardhi (King's College London), "State Scholarship and Talent Building in Indonesia"
Charlene Song (University College London), "Constructing Patriotic Southeast Asian Studies: Critical Perspectives on the Field in Chinese Universities since 2022"

**The Politics of Space in Southeast Asia**

Anusha Arumugam (LSE), "Scales of Wartime Political Order: Myanmar's Civil War"

Hanh-An Trinh (LSE), "Speculative Atmospheres: Real Estate Events and the Narratives of Building a Better Nation"

Huda Mahmoud (University of Cambridge), "Identity and shaping liveability in the port city: The Malaysian Case"

**Sustaining Unsustainable Labour Conditions in Indonesia**

Irfan Asgani (University of Cambridge), "Controlling Labour, Extracting Value: Labour Regime in Indonesia's Nickel Frontier"

Putu Agung Nara Indra Prima Satya (University of Amsterdam), "The Unfulfilled Hopes and Racial Tensions in a Chinese Project in Indonesia: Case Study of Ciharapan Power Plant"

Mireille Marcia Karman (School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London), "How Informality Sustains the Waste Management System: The Case of Informal Workers of the Recycling Industry in Bandung"

“I really enjoyed the SEAC workshop and found it especially useful because it gave me the chance to learn from other Southeast Asian scholars working on very different topics. It was also a great space for meeting people, exchanging ideas, and building connections. For me, it has probably been one of the most useful area studies platforms I have taken part in.”

**Jettawat Pravat**
(King’s College London)

---

“The workshop was beneficial for me, particularly in helping me find other students with the same research interests.”

**Mireille Marcia Karman**
(SOAS, University of London)

---

“Participating in the LSE Saw Swee Hock Southeast Asia Centre PhD Workshop 2026 was a truly valuable and inspiring experience. As a presenter, I had the opportunity to share my work-in-progress research, receive thoughtful feedback, and engage in meaningful academic discussions with fellow PhD candidates working on diverse topics related to Southeast Asia. The workshop provided a wonderful platform not only to present and refine our research but also to exchange ideas, learn from one another, and build connections within the wider Southeast Asian studies community.

One of the highlights for me was the opportunity to meet, talk with, and connect with many scholars and PhD researchers from diverse universities, including LSE, University College London, University of Bath, King’s College London, the University of Oxford, and others. These conversations were intellectually stimulating and reminded me of the importance of academic communities in shaping and strengthening our research journeys.”

**Anh Dinh-Hong**
(University College London)

## PhD Student Research Profile: Hanh-An Trinh



I still vividly remember the summer of 2019 after my first-year of college, when I came back to Hải Phòng for a few weeks. I was born and grew up there, and, for the longest time, the city was a "sleeping dragon" as the locals said, where the quality of life was high, but nothing ever changed. Yet in the summer of 2019, several new bridges appeared, the first few New Urban Areas with European-inspired design took shape, the first skyscraper sprouted up, and I had to relearn how to navigate the transformed city roads. Although at the time I was still studying math and visual arts, my interest in urban space and the built environment had already been sparked, making these observations stick with me until today.

Later on, shifting my concentration to studying sociology and geography at the University of Chicago, I read more urban social theory, from discussions of urbanization and financialization, to more general theory on the economy, society, and space. In my readings, I always tried to locate where the case of Hải Phòng's development stood, both in abstract comparison and in socio-political relation with these theories. This also encouraged me to read more about the history, development, and regional economy of Vietnam, and to understand Southeast Asia, our similarities and relations, our complex historical narratives and geopolitical positions.

The curiosity nurtured through books, through the wisdom of others, and through my slow steps walking through bits of the world encouraged me to pursue a PhD, to find the answers to the gazillions of questions I had. At the time, there were not many Vietnamese urban ethnographers, and smaller cities other than Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City almost never became research sites. That said, the group of young researchers—including Vietnamese PhD students—doing qualitative research about Vietnam is quickly growing today.

When choosing PhD programs, I searched globally for ones with a good fit in research interest, supportive and analytical supervisors, a robust department culture, and a strong cluster of scholars interested in Southeast Asia. I landed at LSE, one of my top choices, and after three years, all of the things I sought are still here. I have the best pair of supervisors, very different scholars, but both are brilliant, kind, engaging, patient, critical, and sharp. My friends and colleagues in the Department of Geography and Environment work on many exciting problems, and we connect not only by sharing our work in seminars but also by eating meals, going hiking, and exploring corners of London together.

The LSE's Saw Swee Southeast Asia Centre provides another space of connection. The Wednesday seminars are always interesting, both when I learn about an entirely new topic, and when getting deeper insights and a new conceptual framing of familiar issues. I also really appreciate the times when we have opportunities to chat with speakers over lunch after the seminars, when I can understand their broader research agendas and academic journeys in a casual, friendly environment. The Centre's annual PhD Workshop in June also started in my first year of PhD, providing a wonderful space and a support network for early-career Southeast Asian academics from across the UK.

I am also incredibly thankful for the financial support I received from SEAC through the PhD Fieldwork Support Fund. This fund assisted me through my first field trip in 2025 for almost nine months, during which I came back to Hải Phòng, once again with questions about the abrupt and expansive urbanization and development that has unfolded over the past decade. But going back home as a researcher, an "insider outsider," quickly gave me many answers, and many further questions. Growing up in an extended family with the older generation mostly working in older river ports and steel factories, and the younger generation choosing the new industrial parks, I realized that the current stage of industrialization also plays a fundamental role in this urban transition.

In my dissertation, I aim to complicate the current literature on speculative urbanism in the Global South which heavily focuses on dispossessive, extractive, and non-productive urbanization, by investigating a case with intersecting financial circulations between speculative development and productive industrial expansion. Furthermore, I engage with literature on performativity to analyze how moments of "collective effervescence" are used by the government and real-estate developers to sell the residents uncertain futures of excessive urbanization. I argue that popular support for urban future imaginaries and speculative developments in Hải Phòng is intimately linked to a sense of patriotism, a willingness to "sacrifice" for the development of the city and the country, and a belief that the city's development can protect its believers against future uncertainties and crises.

Vietnam is going through an interesting transitional phase, and throughout my fieldwork, domestic policy shifts and global geopolitical changes are constantly unfolding. This is why studying how people negotiate uncertainties has been exciting. But there are still many questions I am curious about: the political economy of Buddhism and its intersection with the construction and financial industry, the unsustainability of resort development, and the superficial engagement with ecological concerns in the name of growth, to name a few. I am thankful to know that my challenging journey of academic exploration will continue to enjoy the support and wisdom of the many communities of which I am fortunate to be a part.

## Dissertation Fieldwork Grants

SEAC was delighted to receive many competitive applications for the 2025/26 Southeast Asia Student Dissertation Fieldwork Grants. The 11 student awardees were selected based on the strength of their applications and their proposed dissertation fieldwork and research. The grant provides up to a maximum of £500 per awardee towards research expenses, which can go towards categories like accommodation, travel, and local services such as translation or transcription. The Dissertation Fieldwork Grant scheme has been supported over the years by Arvind Khattar, whose generosity has helped SEAC to further develop its research activities.



### Francesca Edralin

**Degree:** MSc Environment and Development

**Fieldwork location:** Philippines

**Dissertation title: A Space Between Paradigms: WWF-Philippines' National Youth Council and the Politics of Youth Participation in Conservation**

This dissertation explored the role of youth councils in shaping more just and inclusive approaches to nature conservation, including emerging climate justice perspectives. Drawing on the WWF Philippines National Youth Council as a case study, the dissertation investigated through qualitative interviews and document analysis how structured youth engagement shapes conservation values and discourse within the Philippines' most prominent conservation organisation.



### Ida Feng Feng Thien

**Degree:** MSc Inequalities and Social Science

**Fieldwork location:** Malaysia

**Dissertation title: Silent Expectations – Class and the Making of Desirable Futures: A study of social class and aspirations among young Malaysians**

This dissertation qualitatively examined how social class shapes early adulthood aspirations among young people in Malaysia. It aimed to investigate aspiration formation less as an expression of individual desire, but as an ongoing negotiation for agency within the constraints and legitimacy 'framework' of social institutions and structures.



### Isabelle Pook

**Degree:** MSc International Social and Public Policy

**Fieldwork location:** Remote, with Singapore as case study

**Dissertation title: Between Two States: Examining Transnational Social Protection through Cross-Border Commuters**

This dissertation examined how Malaysian and Singaporean labour and border policies shape the mobility and experiences of daily cross-border Malaysian commuters working in Singapore. Combining comparative policy analysis with interviews, the dissertation investigated how taxation, work permits and welfare regimes simultaneously facilitate labour mobility while producing exclusion, revealing the negotiated interdependence between both states.



### Kenneth Barroga

**Degree:** MSc Applied Social Data Science

**Fieldwork location:** Philippines

**Dissertation title: Does Knowledge Cross Water? How the Choice of Neighbours Shapes Spatial Spillovers in the Philippine Archipelago**

This dissertation combined satellite imagery, government innovation data, ferry transport records, and expert interviews to test whether ignoring maritime barriers produces a distorted picture of which communities share in the knowledge economy.



### Kwan Yee Koo

**Degree:** LSE–Peking University Double MSc International Affairs

**Fieldwork location:** Singapore and Malaysia

**Dissertation title: From Pawns to Knights: The Rising Agency of Chinese Commodity Elites and Malayan Decolonisation, 1920s-1950s**

This dissertation examined how Britain's imperative to maximise dollar earnings from Malayan rubber and tin, compounded by Cold War tensions, paradoxically empowered Chinese commodity elites to gain leverage and transform their indispensability into agency - extracting political concessions and shaping the constitutional path of Malayan decolonisation on their preferred terms.



### Louise Beatrix Guyot

**Degree:** MSc Empires, Colonialism & Globalisation

**Fieldwork location:** Malaysia, Thailand

**Dissertation title: Patani Mythopoesis: Memorialising and Sustaining Malay Muslim Tradition in a Thai 'Geo-body'**

This dissertation studied the conduits through which Malay Muslims in Thailand's Deep South preserved and nurtured their cultural identity in the early 20th century — most notably throughout the incorporation of the southern provinces into modern-day Thailand. The dissertation detailed the memorialisation of the Patani myth in a Thai 'geo-body', while highlighting the indispensability of a popularly sustained cultural history in the midst of a fraught socio-political environment.



### Siuchieh Tai

**Degree:** MSc Culture, Justice, and Environment

**Fieldwork location:** Taiwan

**Dissertation title: Fermenting Relations: Nước Mắm, Multispecies Care, and the Politics of Migrant Adaptation in Taiwan**

This dissertation examined how a ferment knotted into one coastal ecology is remade in another, focusing on hand-fermented fish sauce made by a Vietnamese marriage migrant and a Taiwanese coastal artisan. Against a genealogy of imperial, colonial, and industrial attempts to govern the ferment, the dissertation developed the notion of "fermentative sovereignty," tracing care, multispecies kinship, and the sensory policing of migrant smells.



### Yohendran Nadar Arulthevan

**Degree:** MSc Public Policy and Administration

**Fieldwork location:** Bali, Indonesia

**Dissertation title: Governing the Commons Without the State: An Institutional Analysis of the Subak as Deliberative Participatory Governance in Bali**

This research examined Bali's Subak system as a model of Empowered Participatory Governance. By testing competing hypotheses of deliberative democracy, hierarchical authority, and ritualised rules, the dissertation explored how indigenous institutions achieve consensus to manage shared water resources independently of the state.



### Xueh Wei Tam

**Degree:** MSc City Design & Social Science

**Fieldwork location:** Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

**Dissertation title: Negotiating Power in Participatory Design for Social Infrastructure in Kuala Lumpur's People's Housing Programme**

This dissertation examined the challenges and outcomes of community-based participatory design processes that seek to redistribute power in infrastructure development. The dissertation investigated how a community-informed approach could amplify the impact of social infrastructure for community well-being and social cohesion among residents of diverse and intersecting identities.



### Yu Xin Chang

**Degree:** MSc City Design & Social Science

**Topic:** Singapore

**Dissertation title: "When I am no longer around…": 'Care as infrastructure' assembled by caregivers and support workers in creating neurodiversity-friendly cities**

This dissertation explored how Singapore's conceptions of health, through the design of public health infrastructure, favour the abled body and invisibilise the networks needed to sustain health. The dissertation foregrounded negotiations with and in public space carried out by caregivers, volunteers, and social workers to support people with special needs.



### Vivienne Ning Tan

**Degree:** LSE–Peking University Double MSc International Affairs

**Fieldwork location:** Jakarta, Indonesia

**Dissertation title: Writing in the Margins: Chinese Indonesian Literary and Cultural Expression in the Cultural Supplements of Harian Indonesia, 1967–1998**

This project examined the cultural supplements of Harian Indonesia, the only Chinese-language newspaper permitted under Suharto's New Order. It explored how ordinary Chinese Indonesians used fiction, film journalism, and traditional cultural practices to sustain their identity under conditions of state suppression between 1967 and 1998.

## Postgraduate Dissertation Prize

The LSE Saw Swee Hock Southeast Asia Centre Postgraduate Dissertation Prize on Southeast Asia showcases outstanding social science research on Southeast Asia from LSE postgraduate students. Submissions were received from across LSE departments, all of which were at first-class level.



### Winner

**Chiara Surowietz**

MSc in Environment and Development

Department of Geography and Environment

**Dissertation title:**

The politics of recognition at the "green" extractivist frontier: FPIC, recognition conflicts, and accumulation through destabilization in Palawan, the Philippines

Chiara Surowietz completed her MSc in Environment and Development at the LSE. She worked in the Dutch energy transition and studied Global Sustainability Science at Utrecht University, where she also conducted fieldwork in the Philippines. This led her to pivot into her MSc, as she felt "sustainable" transitions lacked attention to development questions. Supervised by Professor Kasia Paprocki, her dissertation examines Free, Prior and Informed Consent as a rights-based tool for Indigenous voice in land decisions, and how the politics of recognition shape its outcomes. Chiara now works as a Research Assistant in the Critical Resources Programme at the Clingendael Institute.



### Highy Commended

**Kwan Yee Koo**

MSc International Affairs (LSE-Peking University Double Degree)

Department of International History

**Dissertation title:**

From Pawns to Knights: The Rising Agency of Chinese Commodity Elites and Malayan Decolonisation,1920s-1950s

Kwan Yee Koo recently completed the LSE-Peking University Double Degree in MSc International Affairs. She is interested in the history and developments of political economies in Southeast Asia and received the 2025/26 SEAC Student Dissertation Fieldwork Grant to conduct multi-archival research across Malaysia, Singapore and the UK. Kwan Yee will be joining the ISEAS-Yusof Ishak Institute (Singapore) to study politico-economic trends and issues in Southeast Asia, as well as the region's interactions with its wider geostrategic environment.

## SEAC Café

The SEAC Café is a series of informal small group sessions for open discussion on Southeast Asia topics. Over the course of the year, LSE students were given the opportunity to engage with LSE SEAC Associates in an array of fields to learn more about their specialisms and approaches to research and to better understand pressing issues in the region.

Students were able to meet with the following SEAC Associates:

- **Prof. Hyun Bang Shin**
  **Area of Expertise:** Urban Political Economy, Urban Geography, Urban Studies, Gentrification, Cities, Mega-events, Mega-projects, Asian Urbanism, East and Southeast Asia
  20 February 2026

- **Dr. Qingfei Yin**
  **Area of Expertise:** Cold War, Borderlands, Vietnam, China-Southeast Asia Relations, overseas Chinese
  3 March 2026

- **Dr. Laura Antona**
  **Area of Expertise:** Migration, violence, domestic labour, home, Southeast Asia
  9 March 2026



# Academic Engagement

Scan to visit Events Page >

## 2025-26 Events

Each year, SEAC hosts a wide variety of events that build upon a history of engagement between LSE and Southeast Asia. In 2025/26, the Centre continued to host both in-person and online events and featured a particularly diverse set of speakers as a result, alongside a broad audience from across the LSE, the UK, Southeast Asia, and beyond. Events included documentary film screenings, roundtables, book launches, workshops, and seminars designed to showcase cutting-edge research on Southeast Asia.



10 June 2026

**The Nature of Kingship: The Weather-World in Nineteenth-Century Vietnam (book talk)**

•Dr. Kathryn Dyt (SOAS)



3 June 2026

**PhD Student Workshop**

• Andy Chin (King's College London)
• Jettawat Pravat (King's College London)
• Natalie Page (University of Bath)
• Fandi Achmad (University of Oxford)
• Dythia Sendrata (King's College London)
• Alifia Marina Syarfi (SOAS)
• Jesita Ajani (University of Oxford)
• Kevin Tan (SOAS)
• Kuan Huai Pa (King's College London/ National University of Singapore)
• Said Effendy (University of Cambridge)
• Wayne Huang (University of California at Santa Cruz)
• Wisarut Wongnom (University of Leeds)
• Anh Dinh-Hong (University College London)
• Dwinanda Ardhi (King's College London)
• Charlene Song (University College London)
• Anusha Arumugam (LSE)
• Hanh-An Trinh (LSE)
• Huda Mahmoud (University of Cambridge)
• Irfan Asgani (University of Cambridge)
• Putu Agung Nara Indra Prima Satya (University of Amsterdam)
• Mireille Marcia Karman (SOAS)



27 May 2026

**Counting as Chinese in the Southern Seas: A decade of transimperial enumerations, c. 1901-1907**

• Dr. Rachel Leow (University of Cambridge)



20 May 2026

**Southeast Asia Forum: Flooding in Southeast Asia - Causes, Consequences, and Policy Challenges**

• Dr. Pamela Tolentino (University of the Philippines)
• Dr. Annisa Triyanti (Utrecht University)
• Dr. Thong Tran (The Australian National University)
• Dr. Nuanchan Singkran (Mahidol University)



13 May 2025

**Mobilizing Mainstream Islam: The Politics of Orthodoxy in Indonesia in Comparative Perspective (book launch)**

- Dr. Saskia Schäfer (Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin)



6 May 2026

**Who Says It's Undemocratic? Value Neutrality and Autocratisation in Southeast Asia**

- Prof. Mark R. Thompson (City University Hong Kong)



1 April 2026

**Socialist Meaning-Making Through Rice and the 1967 Rice Riots in Burma/Myanmar**

- Dr. Tharaphi Than (Northern Illinois University)



25 March 2026

**Death by a Thousand Cuts: Digital Repression and Pro-Democracy Movements in Thailand (soft launch)**

- Dr. Janjira Sombatpoonsiri (Chulalongkorn University and GIGA)



18 March 2026

**(In)formality in a 'Singapore-like Cebu': paradoxes and contestations in world-class city-making**

- Dr. Jordana Ramalho (University College London)



11 March 2026

**An Interdisciplinary Approach to Empowering Resilience in Jakarta Sinking City**

- Dr. Emma Colven (King's College London)
- Dr. Zara Shabrina (King's College London)



4 March 2025

**The Strongman and the Last Days of the Khmer Rouge (documentary film screening)**

- James Gerrand




18 February 2026

**Myanmar: Problems and prospects**

- John Groarke



18 February 2026

**Living with coloniality and precarity in Southeast Asia**

- Dr. Geetha Reddy (Open University)
- Dr. Megha Amrith (Maastricht University)
- Enbah Nilah Sugurmar



17 February 2026

**Communication against Capital: Red Enlightenment at the Dawn of Indonesia (book talk)**

- Dr. Rianne Subijanto (The City University New York)



11 February 2026

**After the Exodus: Gender and Belonging in Bangladesh's Rohingya Refugee Camps (book talk)**

Dr. Farhana Afrin Rahman (University of Cambridge)



4 February 2026

**Beyond disinformation: Toxic positivity as influence operation in the Philippines and Indonesia**

- Prof. Nicole Curato (University of Birmingham)




28 January 2026

**Memories of Timor (documentary film screening)**

• Dr. Rita Padawangi (Singapore University of Social Sciences)



28 January 2026

**The politics of oil and gas in Timor-Leste**

• Prof. Judith Bovensiepen (Austrian Academy of Sciences)



21 January 2026

**Resurgence of the Borneo States: Regional Power Blocs and the Reshaping of Malaysia's Centralised Federal-State Relations**

• Dr. Arnold Puyok (Universiti Malaysia Sarawak)



10 December 2025

**Huy Đức and the Rise and Fall of Renovation in Vietnam**

• Prof. Peter Zinoman (University of California, Berkeley)



8 December 2025

**Impunity from below: Vigilantism and the state in democratic Indonesia**

• Dr. Sana Jaffrey (Australian National University)



4 December 2025

**Dynasties, Oligarchies, Cartels: Barriers to Democratic Competition in Southeast Asia**

• Prof. Dan Slater (University of Michigan)



4 December 2025

**Queering Activism in Southeast Asia (workshop)**

• Dr. Sharmila Parmanand (LSE)
• Prof. Meredith Weiss (University at Albany, State University of New York)
• Suyin Haynes (City St George's, University of London, and SOAS)
• Dr. How Wee Ng (University of Westminster)
• Raksha Mahtani (Nanyang Technological University)
• Chihiro Toya (SOAS)
• Tinnaphop Sinsomboonthon (Thammasat University and National University of Singapore)
• Dr. Ferdiansyah Thajib (Friedrich-Alexander University)
• Nattamon Saphaokham (University of Wisconsin-Madison)
• Adrian Beyer (University of Wisconsin-Madison)
• Dr. Nyi Nyi Kyaw (University of Bristol)



3 December 2025

**Nationalism and the governance of sexuality**

• Dr. Pavan Mano (King's College London)



2 December 2025

**Scapegoating queers: Pink-blocking as state strategy**

• Prof. Meredith Weiss (University at Albany, State University of New York)



26 November 2025

**Revisiting "the Exemplary Centre" in Contemporary Indonesia: Ideas, Ideologies, Cosmologies**

• Dr. Martin Slama (Austrian Academy of Sciences)



19 November 2025

**Platformization, Citizenship, and Statecraft in Vietnam: A Three-Body Problem**

• Prof. Marie Gibert-Flutre (Université Paris 1 Panthéon-Sorbonne)



12 November 2025

**Affective Cohorts: Why Elite Schools Matter for Southeast Asian Politics**

• Dr. Daniel Whitehouse (SOAS)



29 October 2025

**Independent from Civilian Control: Military Power in Thailand in 2025**

• Dr. Paul Chambers



27 October 2025

**Tales of Two Cities: Prodemocracy Protests and Beijing's Lengthening Shadow in Bangkok and Hong Kong, 2015-2025**

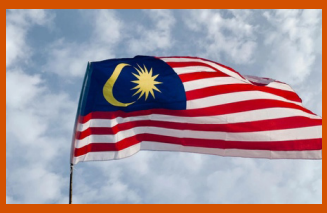
Prof. Jeffrey Wasserstrom (University of California, Irvine)
Wichuta Teeratanabodee (University of Cambridge)



24 October 2025

**The Political Economy of Japanese and Chinese Infrastructure Financing Governance: Organizing Alliances, Institutions and Ideology (soft launch)**

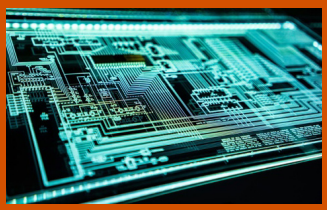
• Dr. Trissia Wijaya (University of Melbourne)



22 October 2025

**Imagining Malaya, Rethinking Merdeka: Decolonisation and Nation-Making through the Perspective of the Peranakan Chinese, 1945-1957 (book talk)**

• Dr. Bernard Keo (Geneva Graduate Institute)



15 October 2025

**Inside Southeast Asia's Cybercrime Compounds (book talk)**

• Mark Bo



8 October 2025

**Calibrated Engagement: Chronicles of Local Politics in the Heartland of Myanmar (book talk)**

• Dr. Stéphen Huard (Institut de Recherche pour le Développement)



1 October 2025

**Caught in the Crossfire: Thai Military Women's Mediated Lived Experience and Self-Representation**

• Dr. Chanapang 'Natty' Pongpiboonkiat (University of Leeds)

## Southeast Asia Forum

The LSE Southeast Asia Forum is SEAC's annual flagship event, designed to bring together leading Southeast Asia experts to engage with some of the region's most critical and pressing issues, as well as to showcase the high-quality research on Southeast Asia conducted at LSE.

Over the course of 2025, large areas of Indonesia, the Philippines, Thailand, and Vietnam faced extensive flooding, with other countries likewise strongly affected during the year. These recent events have reminded people and policymakers across Southeast Asia of a broader trend of increasing flooding in the region, causing untold damage and disruption to people's lives.

Questions about the causes of the flooding, its consequences, and the challenges of mitigation and adaptation are coming to figure more and more prominently on the policy agendas of governments across the region and of multilateral institutions concerned with climate change, environmental governance, and disaster risk management.

Against this backdrop, the LSE's Saw Swee Hock Southeast Asia Centre focused its annual Southeast Asia Forum on the growing problem of flooding across the region. The Centre invited leading specialists on flooding in Southeast Asia from different countries in the region and different disciplines, methodological perspectives, and areas of empirical research focus. Their presentations covered Indonesia, the Philippines, Thailand, and Vietnam and treated the causes, consequences, and policy challenges of increasing flooding from a range of different vantage points.



**Dr. Pamela Louise M. Tolentino (University of the Philippines)**

**"Rethinking Flood Risk and River Management in the Philippines: A Catchment-Scale Perspective"**

Flood risk in the Philippines is often framed as a consequence of extreme rainfall and typhoons. Yet flooding emerges from processes operating across entire catchments, where water, sediment, land use change, and channel modification interact over time. Rethinking flood risk therefore requires closer attention to how rivers function, and how they are managed. Using the Bislak River in northwest Luzon as a case study, Dr. Tolentino's presentation drew on field surveys, remote sensing, and hydraulic modelling to examine how channel confinement and aggregate extraction influence river behaviour. Her findings showed that measures intended to reduce flooding in one location can disrupt sediment transport, reshape channel morphology, and transfer instability elsewhere in the system. Fragmented responsibilities and short planning horizons limited effective responses to these dynamics. A catchment-scale perspective highlighted the need to align river management with sediment connectivity, floodplain processes, and the realities of living with mobile rivers in the Philippines.



**Dr. Annisa Triyanti (Utrecht University)**

**"Beyond the Sea Wall: Navigating the Politics and Governance of Coastal Flooding in Java, Indonesia"**

The northern coast of the Indonesian island of Java is facing a rapidly intensifying crisis wherein climate-driven sea-level rise collides with severe, human-induced land subsidence and coastal erosion. Recent major flooding events across Jakarta, Semarang, and Demak in late 2025 and early 2026 underscore that coastal inundation is no longer a distant risk, but an immediate reality disrupting infrastructure and displacing communities. While the physical processes of Java's sinking coastline are well-documented, the institutional responses remain highly fragmented. Dr. Triyanti's presentation explored the "wicked problem par excellence" of the politics and governance of coastal flooding across different levels of Indonesian administration. A stark divide persisted between national strategies favouring large-scale engineering megaprojects like sea walls and local approaches relying on ecosystem-based measures like mangrove restoration. Using the case of Demak on the northern Java coast, Dr. Triyanti illustrated how community organization, local leadership, and access to external support heavily influenced the outcomes of ecosystem-based measures. Without coordinated regional policy, these localized efforts produced a fragmented "patchwork of protection," leaving many vulnerable groups at continued risk.



**Dr. Thong Tran (The Australian National University)**

**"Transformed waterscapes in the Vietnamese Mekong Delta: Unravelling political relations between water management and adaptation"**

Dr. Tran's presentation reflected on how the waterscapes in the Vietnamese Mekong Delta (VMD) have changed under the compounding impacts of climate change, upstream hydropower development, and local water infrastructure interventions (dykes) for intensified agricultural production over the past decades. It unravelled the political spaces in which state-led water management and farmer-led adaptation had evolved and interacted with each other over time, with the particular focus on the floodplains and the coastal zones of the delta. While infrastructural development gained legitimacy as a key approach to deal with floods and enabled farm-based livelihoods (mostly rice) of rural households in the floodplains, it conversely constrained the aspirations of coastal communities in pursuit of traditional livelihoods (shrimp) that brought comparatively higher incomes. Dr Tran's presentation illuminated how power asymmetries were embedded in the management of water resources across the ecological zones, and how they shaped community adaptation on the ground. Essentially, rural communities were forced to adapt to changing environmental conditions driven by such pro-infrastructure development policies and implement various adaptation strategies to meet their needs. His presentation concluded by demonstrating an ongoing paradigm shift in policy directions from food security towards water security to address water scarcity threatening resource-based livelihoods in the delta.



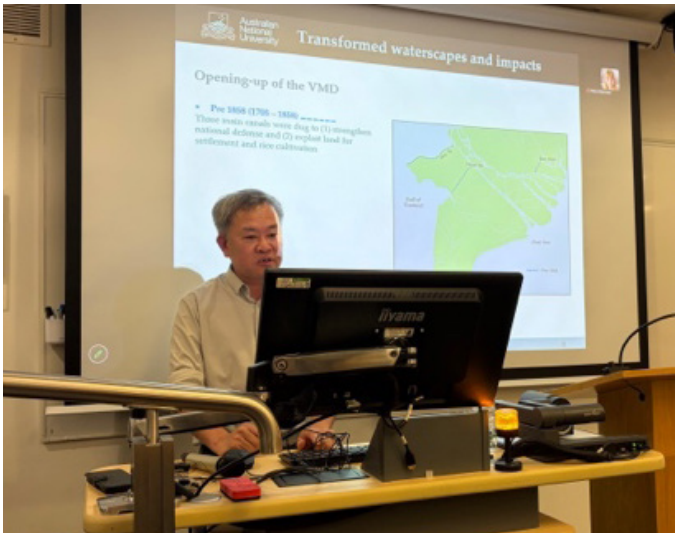
**Dr. Nuanchan Singkran (Mahidol University),**

**"Reshaping Flood Risk Management in Thailand: From Tragedy to Strategic Paradigms"**

Dr. Singkran's presentation examined the critical deficiencies in Thailand's historical and current flood risk management plans. By analyzing the catastrophic 2011 flood as a pivotal case study, particularly within the vital Chao Phraya River Basin, she identified why traditional passive plans were ineffective in practice. These outdated approaches frequently led to inefficient mitigation and social conflict between government bodies and local stakeholders. To address these systemic gaps, Dr. Singkran introduced a strategic flood risk management framework. This progressive paradigm shifted focus toward non-structural measures—such as land-use planning and development controls—and prioritized participatory collaboration. By engaging public and private sectors alongside local communities, this framework aimed to resolve long-standing conflicts and secure the public support necessary for sustainable flood resilience.

**Scan to visit Southeast Asia Forum page >**

## Southeast Asia Forum: Photos














IMAGES OF SOUTHEAST ASIA FORUM 2025

# Southeast Asia Working Paper Series

The Southeast Asia Working Paper Series was launched in April 2022, showcasing work-in-progress research by the SEAC community. Working papers published under this Series are treated as 'work-in-progress', pre-publication versions of academic papers, and therefore as 'drafts' that receive feedback and are subject to future revision. The Series is an open platform for critical and constructive analysis and discussion of Southeast Asian affairs and is open to contributions from all disciplines that SEAC covers in its work. The following Working Papers have been published this year:

## Pyusawhti. Civil war, militarism and Buddhism in central Myanmar

Rakkor Ish and Zo Bilay
August 2026

Myanmar is known as the theatre of long-standing civil wars between the central government and ethnic armed organizations. Yet, after the February 2021 coup, civil war spread across Myanmar's central heartland, also known as the Dry Zone or Anyar region, the arid, densely Bamar-Buddhist agrarian plains of upper-central Myanmar; chiefly the Sagaing, Magway and Mandalay Regions. In this paper, Ish and Bilay focus on the (re)emergence of pro-regime militia, called Pyusawhti, in lowland Myanmar to describe three interacting dynamics at the heart of the postcoup civil war: the effect of militarized clientelism, the moral grammar of Buddhist guardianship, and the schismogenetic escalation of conflict.

## Geo-Economic Contestation over Southeast Asia in the Era of Donald Trump and Xi Jinping

John Sidel, Evelyn Goh, Henry Wai-chung Yeung, Selina Ho, and Alvin Camba
May 2026

Accompanied by a foreword from SEAC Director Professor John Sidel, the essays collected in this Working Paper stem from the authors' presentations at the Southeast Asia Forum held at the LSE in May 2025. Drawing on many years of in-depth empirical research and close, careful, comparative analysis, they shed considerable light on the complexities and contingencies of geo-economic contestation over Southeast Asia, with a focus on China, Japan, and the United States.

**Evelyn Goh**'s essay draws from her keynote address and her ongoing research to sketch the broad contours of the interactions between major Chinese investments and regime security dynamics across Southeast Asia.Her essay emphasizes the importance of regime security as a determinant of nature and extent of Chinese influence accompanying its investments across the region. The essay provides a framework for comparative analysis of the variance observed across the region which emphasizes five key factors: classic performance legitimacy, electoral politics, leader-oligarch coalitions, complex intra-elite dynamics, and state-making imperatives.

**Henry Wai-chung Yeung**'s essay provides a detailed account of the dynamics and consequences of geoeconomic contestation between the United States and China in the specific context of global semiconductor production networks in Southeast Asia and beyond. This essay draws on many years of in-depth research on global semiconductor production networks across East and Southeast Asia, which has borne fruit in countless articles and two landmark book-length studies His essay suggests that Southeast Asia may succeed in expanding its roles and shares in global semiconductor productions network in the context of heightened geo-economic contestation between the United states and China thanks to policy initiatives by Southeast Asian governments in strategic coupling with key partners and the region's expansion as a major market for electronic, industrial, and automotive products in which semiconductors serve as crucial components.

**Selina Ho**'s essay focuses on geo-economic contestation over major infrastructure projects in Southeast Asia, with a focus on China and Japan. Her essay draws on years of research on the political economy of infrastructure projects in Southeast Asia, including in-depth study of Chinese railroad projects across the region. Her essay covers major Chinese railroad projects from Kunming in China's Yunnan Province extending across Cambodia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, Singapore, Thailand, and Vietnam as well as Japanese efforts to compete with China for railroad and other major infrastructure projects across Southeast Asia. The essay shows how Southeast Asian countries' choices of external partners and funders for major infrastructure projects depends on domestic factors, such as elites' legitimating narratives and threat perceptions and variance in economic development and political pluralism.

**Alvin Camba**'s essay examines the links between Chinese megaprojects and powerful political and business networks in Southeast Asia, with a focus on Indonesia, Malaysia, and the Philippines. His essay draws on extensive research focusing on large-scale Chinese investment projects in mining industries and other key sectors across these three countries' ecnomies over the past decade, which has borne fruit in a raft of publications as well as a forthcoming book. His essay shows how Chinese megaprojects across Indonesia, Malaysia, and the Philippines have become enmeshed in relationships with – and embroiled in contests among – powerful business and political coalitions in these countries, and how the varying fates of these Chinese megaprojects depends on the dynamics, trajectories, and outcomes of these relationships and contests.

**Scan to visit SEA Working Paper Series page >**

## SEAC Associates – Publications

### Research articles

**Catherine Allerton.** "Coming of age in- and out-of-place: frictions of adolescent mobility in island Southeast Asia." *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, first published 2 November 2025. https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-9655.70005.

Flora Cornish, Hannah Cowan, **Sharmila Parmanand**, and Kate Summers. "Ending participatory research projects: Entangled temporalities, endy moments and afterlives." Qualitative Research, first published 30 June 2026. https://doi.org/10.1177/14687941261458717.

**Sharmila Parmanand**. "Anti-trafficking or anti-migrant: rethinking the Philippine state's role in global bordering architecture." The International Journal of Human Rights, first published 13 March 2026. https://doi.org/10.1080/13642987.2026.2642179.

Felicia H. M. Liu, Helena Varkkey, **Thomas E. L. Smith**, Peter Reynolds, Pattrawut Pusingha, Haoying Li, and Simran Bungar. "Artivism for Cleaner Air? An Exploration of the Artistic Representation of 'Haze' in Southeast Asia." Environmental Communication 20, no.3(2026): 509–30. https://doi.org/10.1080/17524032.2025.2544561.

Felicia H. M. Liu, **Thomas E. L. Smith**, Vernon Yian, and John Holden. "Seasonality in the Anthropocene: On the construction of Southeast Asia's 'haze season'." The Anthropocene Review 13, no.1(2026), 42-65. https://doi.org/10.1177/20530196251399150.

**Hans Steinmüller**. "Ethnographic Complicity: Mutual Surveillance in Central China and in the Wa State of Myanmar." The Cambridge Journal of Anthropology 44, no.1(2026): 19-36. https://doi.org/10.3167/cja.2026.440103.

**Hans Steinmüller**. "No egalitarianism in the Wa hills: relative commensuration in kinship, sacrifice, and war." Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute 32, no.S1(2026): 85-103. https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-9655.70065.

## LSE Southeast Asia Blog

The Southeast Asia blog is a multi-disciplinary blog that analyses and debates the Southeast Asia region's most critical and pressing issues. Here is a list of posts from Sep 2025 to August 2026:

- **The rules nobody argues about: How Balinese farmers govern water without a state**
  Author: Yohendran Nadar Arulthevan
- **Can Singapore Become the Switzerland of the AI Chip Economy?**
  Authors: Bruno S. Sergi and Kevin Chen
- **Why Adaptive Social Protection Needs Its Own Financing Mechanism**
  Author: Namira Samir
- **Reading and Caring for Democracy: Reflecting on Indonesia's #MembacaMelawan Movement**
  Author: Fadhilah Primandari
- **Education and industry need a broader perspective**
  Author: Muh Afdhal Mubarak AS
- **Towards a Community of Practice in International Environmental Artivism**
  Authors: Felicia Liu and Thomas Smith
- **Critical Political Economy Analysis of Environmental Politics, Governance and Social Conflict in Southeast Asia**
  Author: Syed Mohammed Ad'ha Aljunied
- **Bytes and Biomes: The promises and limits of digital environmental governance in Southeast Asia**
  Authors: Birgit Bräuchler, Lukas Fort, and Walker DePuy
- **Vicente L. Rafael (1956-2026) in Memoriam**
  Author: John T. Sidel
- **Peace Dividends: The Philippines' Southern Gas Gamble**
  Author: Elroi Son Oller Panganiban
- **Malaysia's Borneo Question: Adaptation or Separation?**
  Author: Arnold Puyok
- **In Aceh's Waters, "Making Harmony" Hides Indonesia's Blue Economy Failures**
  Author: Eman Zahid Jokhio
- **Myanmar online reactions to the abduction of President Maduro from Venezuela**
  Authors: Maaike Matelski, Eva van Roekel, and Htet Hlaing Win
- **The Resilience Paradox: Why Indonesia Pays More After Disasters Than Before**
  Authors: Nela Navida and Anisa Indah Pratiwi
- **Debt-for-Nature Swaps in Indonesia: A Political Ecology Perspective on Conservation and Debt**
  Author: Kyunghwan Choi
- **Beyond "Sham Elections": What Myanmar's Failed Vote Reveals About a Fragmenting Military**
  Author: Anusha Arumugam
- **A Border in Disarray: Understanding the Complexities of Thai-Khmer Regional Conflict**
  Author: Deepanshu Mohan
- **The Limits of Trump's Peace Efforts in Southeast Asia**
  Author: Marcus Andreopoulos
- **Gen Z Activism from Asia to Belarus and Beyond, 2019-2025**
  Authors: Wichuta Teeratanabodee, Jeffrey Wasserstrom, and Sasha Razor
- **Who holds the right to dream? Justice and future-making for survivors of the Philippine War on Drugs**
  Author: Amanda Lingao
- **What if Islamism is Regionalism? Ex-Siamese States in the 2018 Malaysian General Election**
  Author: Morris Chan

- **The Increasing popularity of Blue Bonds and Debt-for-Climate swaps in Southeast Asia**
  Author: Ebbe Rogge
- **The disunited front: Western divergences on the Laotian crisis, 1958-1962**
  Author: Alexandre Dupont-Sinhsattanak
- **Corruption and Statelessness in Sabah: How 'Deportability' Becomes a Commodity**
  Author: Hsiang Jien Naik
- **Finding agency across the anti-politics machine: A case from Semarang's adaptation projects**
  Author: Wulandari Anindya Kana
- **Extracting Rare Earths, Exploiting Frontiers: The Human Cost of the International Rare Earths Race in Myanmar**
  Authors: Isabella Aung and Mehek Berry
- **Designing Breast Cancer Policy with Women in Mind: Insights from urban Viet Nam**
  Author: Giang T. Nguyen
- **"Love Thy Neighbour": Social Capital and the Normative Contours of Disaster Response in the Philippines**
  Author: Aya Kobayashi
- **Media representations of migration and their influence on perceptions**
  Author: Tham Ngoc Truong
- **How Democratic Countries are Inadvertently Legitimising Authoritarianism: Lessons from Myanmar's Junta**
  Author: Anusha Arumugam
- **Navigating Two Worlds: Identity Transformation of Karen Youth in Thailand**
  Author: Nitchakan Daramatat
- **Denial of Democratic Agency as an Authoritarian Tactic: Reflections from Indonesia**
  Author: Fadhilah Primandari
- **When Cybertroopers Shape the Crowd: Online Conformity in Indonesia**
  Author: Moses H. Siregar
- **After Displacement: The Temuan's Community Everyday Navigation of Urban Life in Kuala Lumpur**
  Author: Badrul Hisham Ismail
- **Book review: Second Opinion: Essays on Health, Culture, and Society (Ateneo de Naga University Press, 2025) by Gideon Lasco**
  Author: Aya Kobayashi

Scan to visit Blog Series page>

# Podcast




Dialogues on Southeast Asia is a podcast series hosted by the Centre. It features discussions with specialists in diverse disciplines and with different expertise on the countries of the region and Southeast Asia as a whole.

Dialogues on Southeast Asia episodes are available on all major podcast streaming platforms, including Spotify and Apple Podcasts. The series is part of the New Books Network, an academic podcast platform with a global reach.

---

**Thailand's February 2026 Snap Election**
*20 February 2026*

In this episode, host Dr. Petra Alderman (LSE-SEAC) sits down with Prof Duncan McCargo, President's Chair in Global Affairs at Nanyang Technological University in Singapore and a world-leading specialist on Thai politics, to unpack the 8 February 2026 snap election and constitutional referendum in Thailand. The results paint a mixed picture: a decisive win for the country's conservative forces alongside signals of progressive change, particularly regarding the drafting of a new constitution. Professor McCargo focuses on the comparative politics of Southeast Asia, especially Thailand, on which he has published widely. He is the author of a dozen books, including Fighting for Virtue: Politics and Justice in Thailand (Cornell, 2019) and Future Forward: The Rise and Fall of a Thai Political Party (NIAS Press, 2020).

**Islam, Society, and Politics in Indonesia**
*29 August 2025*

In this episode, host Professor John Sidel (LSE-SEAC) talks to Robert Hefner, Professor of Anthropology and Professor of Global Studies at Boston University, about the intersection of Islam, society, and politics in Indonesia, the world's single-largest majority Muslim country and the world's third biggest democracy. Indonesian Islam is notable for its diversity, its associational strength, and its prominent role in both the transition from authoritarian rule to democracy in the late 1990s and in democratic politics in the country since that time. Professor Hefner is the author of four major studies of Islam in Indonesia: Hindu Javanese: Tengger Tradition and Islam (Princeton University Press, 1985), The Political Economy of Mountain Java: An Interpretive History (University of California Press, 1990), Civil Islam: Muslims and Democratization in Indonesia (Princeton University Press, 2000), and, most recently, Islam and Citizenship in Indonesia: Democracy and the Quest for an

Inclusive Public Ethics (Routledge, 2024). He is also the author of a long list of journal articles and book chapters and the editor or co-editor of no less than fifteen edited or co-edited volumes, many of which serve as foundational texts in the comparative study of religion and of Islam in particular. A towering figure in the study of Islam in Indonesia and in the comparative study of religion more broadly. Robert Hefner's work spans the disciplines of anthropology, sociology, and political science to cover the intersection and interplay of religion, society, and politics in Indonesia and beyond.

**Scan to visit Podcast page>**

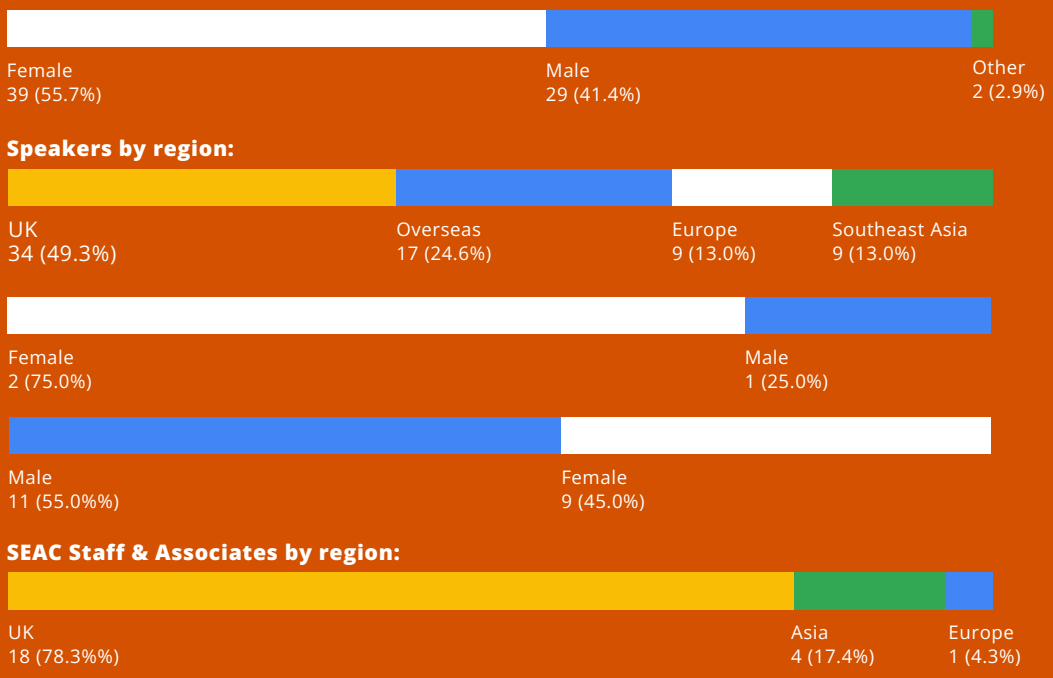


# EDI at the Centre

SEAC approached all its work with LSE's commitment to Equity, Diversity and Inclusion in mind. This approach is especially evident in our events programme, where we have welcomed a diverse range of speakers to the Centre to discuss regional topics from a variety of backgrounds, approaches, and academic disciplines. Decentring knowledge production and access to knowledge is core to the Centre's approach. We are pleased to report on our Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) at the Centre, and in particular, to share statistics on our speakers:

**35**
Number of events

**70**
Number of speakers




**3**
Number of SEAC Staff

**20**
SEAC Associates




## Outreach and Engagement

### Student Engagement

LSE's student body comprises around 7% of students from Southeast Asia, with 10% of undergraduate students from Southeast Asia, reflecting the region's diversity, culture, and peoples. As Southeast Asia's hub at LSE, SEAC continues to actively engage with Southeast Asian students, particularly with LSE Students' Union societies related to Southeast Asia:

- **Filipino Society**
- **Malaysia Club**
- **Singapore Society**
- **Indonesian Society**
- **Thai Society**
- **Vietnamese Society**

**Student numbers from Southeast Asia**

| | 2025-2026 | |
|---|---|---|
| | UG | PG |
| Myanmar | 5 | 4 |
| Thailand | 50 | 40 |
| Laos | 0 | 0 |
| Vietnam | 24 | 20 |
| Cambodia | 0 | 3 |
| Malaysia | 224 | 35 |
| Singapore | 297 | 87 |
| Brunei | 5 | 0 |
| Indonesia | 26 | 65 |
| Philippines | 8 | 16 |
| Timor Leste | 0 | 0 |
| TOTAL | 639 | 270 |

**Saw Swee Hock Southeast Asia Centre**
London School of Economics and Political Science

# Autumn Term Events 2026

## SEPTEMBER

**30th**
**12pm-1.15pm**

**Angela Minas,** Univesity of Manchester
**Justin See,** Univesity of Melbourne
Reimagining Climate Resilient Development: Radical Hope and Climate Action in the Philippines

## OCTOBER

**12th**
**5.00pm-6.15pm**

**Thitinan Pongsudhirak,** Chulalongkorn University
ASEAN's Indispensable Paradox: One Region, Multiple
Fault Lines

**19th**
**5pm-6.15pm**

**Julia Behrens,** WBGU - German Advisory Council on Global Change
The power of sustainable development: Negotiating power structures through narratives and practices of sustainable development in Vietnam and beyond

**28th**
**2pm-3.15pm**

**Felicia Liu,** University of York
Can Art Drive Environmental Action in Southeast Asia?

# Autumn Term Events 2026

# NOVEMBER

**10th**
**3pm-5pm**

**SEAC & The Asia Foundation Roundtable**

The Energy Crisis in Southeast Asia: Consequences for Economic Growth, Political Stability, and Energy Transitions?

**11th**
**12pm-1.15pm**

**Christian Lentz,** University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

National Reconstruction of Colonial Territory in Southeast Asia

**18th**
**5pm-6.15pm**

**Clare Rewcastle Brown,** independent

The China Contract - How The World's Biggest Financial Scandal Was Covered Up (Book launch)

**23rd**
**12pm-1.15pm**

**Duc Khuong Nguyen,** University of Cambridge

Four Decades of Vietnam's Economic Transformations: Growth, Reforms, Resilience, and the Next Development Frontier

**23rd**
**5pm-6.30pm**

**Romalyn Ante,** independent

The Left-behind Child (novel)



Scan to visit Events Page >

# The Saw Swee Hock Southeast Asia Centre

**Support Us**

As the primary hub for Southeast Asia research in the UK, SEAC seeks funding to help support its mission. The Centre is looking to engage in individual and long-term partnerships to drive the work of the Centre and to work together to promote research on Southeast Asia. Without generous support, this vital hub for academic research on Southeast Asia would be lost, marginalising scholarship on the region and limiting possibilities for learning and exchange. The generous support of funders will allow SEAC to continue its work and impact, through our funding priorities. Below is an illustration of how your support can help us:

- £1000 will enable an undergraduate or Master's student to undertake dissertation research in Southeast Asia
- £5000 will enable the Centre to host a small workshop with participants from Southeast Asia.
- £5000-10,000 grant will fund a PhD student's fieldwork in Southeast Asia.
- £10-20,000 will provide seed funding for LSE academic staff research projects in Southeast Asia.
- £20,000 will enable the Centre to host a conference with public lectures focused on major contemporary issues in Southeast Asia
- £110,000 will pay for a fully-funded PhD for a UK student focused on Southeast Asia
- £175,000 will pay for a fully-funded PhD for a student from Southeast Asi
- £10 million will serve as a long-term endowment to allow the Centre to survive for years to come.

Scan to visit Support Us page>

THE LONDON SCHOOL OF ECONOMICS AND POLITICAL SCIENCE

**LSE** is a global community of people and ideas in the heart of central London. We're a specialist social sciences university, ranking sixth in the world in the **QS World University Rankings by Subject 2024** and as the top university in London in the **Complete University Guide 2025**. LSE's motto "rerum cognoscere causas" means "to know the causes of things". It was chosen to support the School's founding purpose, "for the betterment of society". Our ambition today is to be the leading social science university with the greatest global impact. Led by our new President and Vice Chancellor, Professor Larry Kramer who joined LSE in April 2024

## International Outlook

We are committed to building a vibrant, equitable and truly inclusive environment for staff and students from all over the world. We have partnerships with globally renowned universities spanning Europe, Africa, America and Asia including CIVICA - The European University of Social Sciences. In the UK, we are part of the Russell Group, the Aspect social science research commercialisation network, and the launch of SHAPE – Social sciences, Humanities and the Arts for People and the Economy.

## An LSE Education

We help students prepare for bright futures in world-changing roles. A rigorous social science education is designed to stretch students intellectually through specialist undergraduate and postgraduate programmes, executive education, distance learning and summer schools. LSE students are members of one of the largest economic and social science libraries in the world. Initiatives such as LSE LIFE, the PhD Academy, Student Futures, Careers, Volunteering and Generate provide academic, personal and professional support for students too. The student-led Houghton Street Press is one of many ways LSE students engage with the world.

## Research and Society

LSE academics conduct social science research that makes a lasting impact on society. This means students are taught by academics that regularly advise international bodies and governments, and who are also vocal in the media on current news. The 2021 Research Excellence Framework, a national evaluation exercise, ranked LSE as a top university for research quality and impact. We're continuously expanding our research horizon to reflect and aid the changing society around us. Our current Understanding Global Politics initiative brings together LSE research to shed light on the topic.

SOUTHEAST ASIA

**LSE Saw Swee Hock**
**Southeast Asia Centre (SEAC)**

Houghton Street, London
WC2A 2AE

Instagram: **instagram.com/seaclse**
YouTube: **youtube.com/@lseseac**
Blog: **blogs.lse.ac.uk/SEAC**
LinkedIn: **linkedin.com/in/lse-saw-swee-hock-southeast-asia-centre-717163214**

**Contact**

**seac.admin@lse.ac.uk**
**lse.ac.uk/seac**